

Celestine N. Bittle, O.M. Cap.

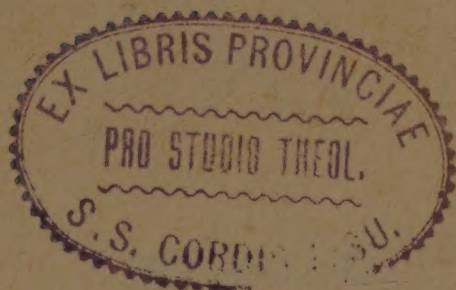


# Soldiering for Cross and Flag

Impressions of a War Chaplain

Celestine N. Bittle, O.M.Cap., M.A.

WITHDRAWN



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TO MY MOTHER  
WHO INSTILLED IN MY HEART THE LOVE  
OF CROSS AND FLAG  
AND  
TO MY COMRADES  
BOTH LIVING AND DEAD  
OF THE M. T. C. RECONSTRUCTION PARK  
AT VERNEUIL, FRANCE  
THIS BOOK IS  
REVERENTLY AND LOVINGLY  
DEDICATED







## INTRODUCTION

On the pages that follow, we have under the title of "Soldiering for Cross and Flag" an all-interesting story which is an authentic and fitting account of the personal experiences of a United States Army Chaplain, Father Celestine Bittle, who rendered his share of duty with the American Expeditionary Forces in France during the World War.

"Soldiering for Cross and Flag" is not only a very complete account of one American soldier's life, from his enlistment to his honorable discharge from military service; it is also a faithful picture of an organization that rendered an important service in the winning of victory for the American arms and ideals.

Into the fabric of his personal narrative the author has woven interesting and accurate items of information concerning the life and work, the hopes and disappointments, the joys and sorrows of our camp in France. With this historical material he has blended a wealth of personal incidents, both from his own life and that of our soldiers, which makes the book intensely human and very readable.

J. W. FLORIDA,  
Former Lt.-Colonel, M.T.C.  
Reconstruction Park,  
Verneuil, France





# SOLDIERING FOR CROSS AND FLAG





## CHAPTER I

### A LITTLE SLIP OF YELLOW

"A telegram from the War Department!"

A special messenger met me in front of the monastery with the familiar yellow envelope. As I took it, my fingers trembled and my pulse raced. I quickly ripped the envelope apart and unfolded the message.

Washington, D. C.  
Aug. 21, 1918.

"Rev. Celestine Bittle, O.M.Cap.  
St. Lawrence College,  
Mt. Calvary, Wis.

Confidential orders today announce your appointment Chaplain United States Army, rank First Lieutenant. Proceed to Hoboken, New Jersey, and report not later than September fifth to Commanding General, Port of Embarkation, prepared for extended field service.

Harris, Acting Adjutant General."

My brain spun in a tumult of conflicting emotions. I was now a chaplain, and I felt happy in the thought that my dream had come true. I knew not what the future held in its lap. This little yellow slip might be my death warrant. What of it? I was prepared for the best and the worst that the war could offer. "Hoboken, Port of Embarkation, extended field service." Short words, indeed, but filled with an ominous

meaning! No preliminary training in the States then. Overseas, immediately.

I stood on the threshold of the Great Adventure.

On April 6, 1917, our country declared war on Germany. The fact had left me cold and sober. I was not carried away on the wave of a delirious war enthusiasm, nor did I grow phrenetic in a spasm of hysterical patriotism. Patriotism to me was more than a wild waving of the Stars and Stripes and a loud-mouthed damning of the enemy. It meant service of the most sterling loyalty. A service that was blessed with the highest devotion, giving all that could be given, even the supreme sacrifice.

I held no illusions on the glamor and the glory of war. All the fine phrases of the enthusiasts could never make war a pink-tea affair. War is a flaming Moloch of bronze and brass, into whose bottomless maw the best youth of the lands is pitched, and all the shouting of the war demagogues cannot drown out the soul-piercing cries of the millions of poor soldier lads who shriek their pain-torn souls up into the hands of God. War is a destroyer of civilization, the obscene carnage of races on a nation-wide scale.

And into this whirlpool of blood and filth, into this turmoil of horror and cruelty, I was about to plunge. I felt that my country needed my service. Not as a fighter. The priest's hands were not annointed to handle an automatic or to shoulder a gun. His mission is different. If I could not be a demon of battle, I would be an angel of peace, a guiding finger for the



blood-drenched souls winging their way to the Land of Rest.

Day and night the idea haunted me. Surely the Catholic lads needed their priests, so I would be one of them. My heart was set upon entering the service in the summer following the declaration of war. Illness, however, made this impossible, and so September saw me again at the college teaching philosophy, eagerly awaiting the close of the scholastic year. The year over, I sent my application for a chaplaincy through Bishop Hayes, the Ordinary of the Army and the Navy, to the War Department. And here was the answer.

As I walked into the monastery, the fateful telegram in my hand, I felt far away. Over there. France. No Man's Land. Zero hour. Staccato commands. A rush of soldier bodies. Shells. Machine guns. A stumble and a fall. Blood and death. And I knelt beside a pale, tortured face, helping a poor soul torn from its body. A war chaplain! And there was a song in my heart.

On August 26, the whole monastery assembled to bid me farewell. We stood before the convent portals—many-wrinkled and white-bearded Brothers, heads bent with the weight of years of service; students, straight as saplings, clean as a brook; and the Fathers, fellow professors, pals and brothers every one of them, with souls as true as gold.

My heart was full. One by one they shook my hand, some quiet, some chaffing, but all with a smile.

It was a smile of cheer and encouragement, though in the faces of some there seemed to be a secret sadness, a hidden wistfulness.

"Hope you come back, old top!"

"Thanks. I shall, God willing."

I turned away, and entered the waiting automobile. A long line of cars strung out in parade form. The country boys were giving me an escort of honor to Fond du Lac.

"Good-by, everybody!"

"Godspeed!"

Cheers and good wishes—and off we were. Down the hill and out along the country road in a cloud of dust. A mile away we came to a wide bend in the road, and once more I turned my eyes to the good old hill. There stood the church, the monastery, the college. Dazzling in the sunlight, lifted up into the very blue of heaven—majestic, calm.

I had never realized before that the Mount had grown so deep into my soul. Here, behind these cream-shimmering walls, I had spent the golden years of my life—the student years of my classics, and the nine years of my teaching. In my youth I had been given here the ripe grapes of knowledge; they had gone through the press of the mind, seasoned and clarified with the years, and I had given them to the students in draughts of strong, heady wine of philosophy. Now no more. I felt a tightening of the throat. A last look, and it was gone.

Farewell!



That night I sat at home with mother and the family in Milwaukee. What a difference a few weeks had made! A month ago, garbed in the brown habit of the Capuchins, and now in the khaki of the Army, with the distinction of being a war chaplain!

Mother, I could see, felt proud of her boy. But deep down in her heart?

"Mother, how do you feel about the war?" I put the question almost timidly. There was a pause. And then:

"Son, I was born in the Fatherland and spent my youth there. I loved it and love it still. Every decent person should love the land of his birth; and I am not ashamed of mine. But I made America the land of my adoption, and here I married your father. We found happiness in our new country. God blessed us with a large family—twelve children—and eleven are still living. This is your home country, for you are born Americans; but father became an American citizen, and so did I. Father is buried here, and I expect to be buried at his side. So, if you wish to know what I think about the war, I will tell you: I do not like to see Germany lose, but I want to see America win!" Could anything have been more pathetic and more loyal?

"And what do you think about *my* going to war?"

Again a little pause. And then: "It is painful for me to see anybody go to war, to maim and kill his fellow men. But your going, my son, is different. To help the soldiers, to save their souls, to lead them to

heaven—that is a wonderful thing. And God will be with you, and bless you.” Could anything have been more religious and more motherly?

She spoke right out of my heart, and I felt very proud of my little mother. She never, in the three days that I was home, brought up the possibility of my not returning. With a tacit understanding, no one mentioned the subject. But it lingered in everybody’s mind, and it showed itself when we parted.

On the evening of August 29, we formed a little group in the station. In ten minutes the train would leave. The hands of the big clock seemed to go cruelly fast. No one cared to talk much, each mind occupied with the thought which none dared utter. My heart hung heavy in my bosom. I looked at mother. Her face was white and drawn, with a shadow over her eyes. We both suffered, but outwardly we carried on. There would be no scene, and little show of sentiment.

“I’ll have to board my train now.”

I shook hands with my sisters and brothers. And then I stood before my mother. Our eyes met. A choked sob, a little cry, like a wounded bird—and she flew into my arms! The shell of reserve was not strong enough and broke into a thousand pieces. She buried her head on my shoulder and sobbed. A lump rose in my throat, and a mist blinded my sight. “Brace up, Mother!”

A flutter of white went to her eyes, she dried her tears, and stepped back. “I’m all right, now.”



Brave little mother of mine! I admired her. Still holding her hands, I smiled down upon her, and she smiled too, a smile beaming through tears! I kissed her, and then walked swiftly to the train.

I took my seat at the window. A bell, a shout—we were going. I threw a kiss to mother, and she to me. I never expected to see her again this side of heaven.

“Good-by, Mother! I’m coming back to you!” She waved her handkerchief, then drew it slowly to her face. I closed my eyes.

Farewell!

New York was to me a revelation and a pandemonium. The rush and racket of traffic stunned and stimulated. The city seemed a roaring inferno set to the music of the spheres, a gigantic seething caldron, stirred by some Titan alchemist, throwing up all the gold and all the scum of a superheated civilization. The best and the basest of the race. Here was the heart and the brain of the country.

A country at war. In the turmoil of the trades of peace one hardly realized it. But beneath the surface one’s hand could feel the throb of a feverish pulse, and in the undertone one’s ear could detect the dull boom of the distant guns of France. Yes, we were in war. Flags and flags. Soldiers and sailors. Salutes and countersalutes.

I paid my respects to Bishop Hayes, the Chaplain-Bishop of the Army and Navy, and then went on to Hoboken. This was on September 5.

I stopped at a big iron gate, where a sentinel walked up and down in a steady, measured step, rifle on his shoulder. Another stood to the side, hands behind his back. I stepped up to him. He clicked his heels, came to attention, saluted. Ha, but that was snappy! I did the same, though *not* so snappy.

"I am to report to the general of the Port of Embarkation, Sergeant."

"This way, sir."

I followed him into a building not far away, and he led me to a desk. "Here you are, sir."

I turned to the seated officer and saluted. With the trifling reality of this military salute I knew I really had entered the service, and that from this moment on the war became an intimate personal matter for me, the possibilities of which I could not foresee.

"Sir, I wish to report for duty."

"Name, sir?"

I handed him my telegram, and after reading it, he said, "Yes, sir. We were expecting you. Now, if you will report at this office tomorrow morning, we will fix you up in a hurry."

With these simple words I was swept into the machinery of the Army, into the wheels of war, which began to move with clocklike precision and dispatch. There was no hesitancy and no fumbling.

By noon the next day everything was finished. I obtained my certificate of identity, entitling me, "if captured, to the privileges of a prisoner of war." Then I received my transportation orders, stating:



"You will report at Officer's Gangway, Vessel No. 271, Pier No. 97, North River, at 9:00 A.M. Sept. 8, 1918, foot of West 57th St., New York City, ready to go aboard vessel."

Finally, the officer gave me an envelope, saying, "Here are your sealed orders, Chaplain. Do not part with them under any circumstances until they are asked for by the military authorities on the other side. And remember, sir, all this is strictly confidential and secret. Good day, sir!"

"Good day to you, sir."

I was informed, however, that the ship would not sail until Monday morning, September 9. At nine I boarded the ship and went to my cabin. After depositing my baggage, I repaired to the deck, where I saw a mat on which were the words "S. S. Grampian." Evidently it was an English or British Colonial liner, of about ten thousand tons. Officers and soldiers leaned over the railing, watching the preparations for departure.

Two tugs nosed their way to our ship and attached themselves, one to the bow, the other to the stern. At 9:30 the crew loosened the hawsers, and the tugs pushed and pulled and maneuvered us out of the slip into the river, like two busy little ants hauling a huge, unwieldy caterpillar. Slowly, heavily, the ship obeyed, and soon floated lazily down the Hudson.

There was the glorious skyline of New York; the squatty army piers of Hoboken; the famous Battery. Wherever I looked on the ship, I saw soldiers. It

seemed so very much as if they were taking their last long look at the world!

Boats of every description passed us in all directions and, as we moved among them, they greeted us with shrill, screeching whistles, deep-voiced, sonorous sirens, and pleasant, melodious horns. Hands waved and kerchiefs fluttered, and from a ferryboat there came the faint sound of cheers. But the soldier lads did not cheer in return. The enthusiasm of the early war days had vanished. This was no outing; it meant a voyage to the seat of war. They felt serious, and so did I.

We hove into sight of the Statue of Liberty. She stretched her greatness into the sky—the emblem of Freedom with the Light of Hope. It was my first glimpse of her. Would it be the last? God alone could tell.

As we passed her gigantic image, somewhere on the boat a clear baritone began the song "Over There." In a few seconds there were a dozen voices; then a hundred; then five hundred; then a thousand; then the whole ship. Like a tremendous wave the song burst from the ship and rolled over to that little island, greeting and enveloping it. It was the modern gladiators' way of saying: "*Morituri te salutamus!*"

Then a hush fell over the ship again, and the Statue moved into the distance. I looked about me. Many a lad raised his hand in a silent gesture, his eyes turned to the Statue. My eyes, too, turned in that direction.

“Good-by, Old Lady with the Lamp! Some day I hope to greet you again!”

Some day ——. Would it come true? I knew it not. Only this I knew: We were sailing toward Destiny; into the Unknown; through the Darkness; to War!

Our Ship of Silence moved slowly down the waters.  
Farewell!



## CHAPTER II

### DESTINATION UNKNOWN

A magnificent and colorful spectacle unfolded itself as we steamed out to sea from lower New York Bay, where the rest of the convoy awaited our coming. As we passed into view, they lifted anchor, and funnels spouted up clouds of dense black smoke, smudging the sun. One by one they sailed out of Gravesend Bay, a destroyer in the lead, cutting the surface with clean, graceful strokes.

As we hit the open seas, the ships fanned out in different directions, maintaining a loose-jointed formation. Far ahead the American destroyer set the pace; an American battleship held the rear, and a British battleship rode majestically, holding the center — “nicely protected,” as someone sarcastically remarked, “by the fifteen troop ships of the convoy.”

Round about us and on all sides the omnipresent subchasers scurried along like water spiders, darting in and out among the ships, shooting out into the sea at a tangent, slipping in wide curves across the front, now high on the crest of a wave and then hidden in the bottom of a swell, unceasingly busy to protect us against the lurking submarine, the shark of the sea.

High in the air and ahead of us a Navy blimp pur-

sued its solitary course. The sky was a clear turquoise blue, without a cloud or a fleck of mist. It rested on the circle rim of the horizon like a huge crystal dome. And there, in all its scintillating glory, hung the sun, flooding this dome with a deluge of light. And in this blinding light floated the elongated silver body of the blimp in an easy, lazy fashion, like a monster toy balloon held on an invisible string by some hand hidden beneath the waves. Every moment I thought it would strike the blue dome of the sky and burst with a tremendous explosion.

The blimp was accompanied by airplanes weaving intricate figures above our heads. Zooming along with a roar, they streaked away into the distance until their motors died down to a murmurous drone. Like dragon flies they twisted about, their glittering wings flashing in the sunlight, back and forth, to and fro, guiding us and guarding us, their far-seeing eyes scanning the treacherous deep.

Farther and farther we went, gliding and dancing, bobbing and dipping. Little by little the ships maneuvered into their assigned positions. We occupied the left of the center, almost on the extreme fringe of the convoy; the others moved to the right of us, ahead and behind. My hand itched for my camera, but military regulations held it back. Never, before this war, had the world seen such a strange sight; so many and such large ships congregated on so small an area, moving together in concerted action. They zigzagged from side to side, like drunken sailors coming back from port after a carousal.

A voice nearby struck my ear. "Isn't this a queer-looking outfit?"

It was. The camouflaging on the steamers presented a most curious and interesting sight. Broad bands of gray and black ran along and across the boats in seemingly senseless patterns. They broke up the regular contour of the ships' lines in such a way that a submarine would be deceived as to length and relative position. It looked fantastic, grotesque; like a cubistic nightmare.

Once beyond the immediate danger zone, the airplanes drew together, banked, and winged their way home. The mosquito craft followed. Eventually, the dirigible cut a wide circle through the blue, and slowly, sleepily drifted back to port. And thus we sailed into the sea.

A short distance from me a group of doughboys stood near the railing, looking over the water, engaged in an animated conversation.

"Well, then, where do you think we're headed for?"

"I heard we're bound for Brest."

"Brest? Lord save us! That's a mudhole, they tell me."

"Don't worry, you'll be kissing more than one mudhole before the war is through with you! I heard an officer say we're going to Bordeaux."

"Bordeaux? That's where they have the fine wine, isn't it? Me for Bordeaux!"

"Say, Snoops, what have you got to say? You and



the top sergeant are as thick as molasses, and they say he is official adviser to the War Department and knows everything; so *you* ought to know. Where are we going?"

"Snoops" thought deeply for a long five seconds, and then answered with solemnity: "To China."

"To China? Aw, come on, Snoops. Be serious!"

"Well, then—to Syria!"

"Now we've heard from everybody here in this Council of War, except Jack. He's mooning at the water. Seasick? Where do you think we're going, Jack?"

Jack never looked up, but said laconically: "To hell."

"Perhaps you're right, Jack!"

And the whole group leaned back and laughed good-naturedly.

Just then, from one of the transport ships, faintly but distinctly, the strains of a military band stole gently over the waters. It was a popular soldier song of the day. On our boat a voice here, a voice there, and nearby a quartette, took up the tune; some whistled it and some hummed it: "We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way!" No one knew where we were going; but, at any rate, we were "on our way!" That was it. Exactly that!

The day passed; the night came on—the first night at sea.

The sun was sinking. The dazzling silver-white disc grew larger and fuller, turning slowly into a

flaming crimson gold. Closer and closer it slipped to the sea. The sea itself was a blaze of color. Green and blue and black. A tumultuous tumble of capricious waves. And all along the crests and ridges the golden fire of the sun ran in serpentine flashes, leaping from wave to wave, sliding down to the depths, spinning away along the surface, flattening into dancing pools, skitting up the shimmering sides, until at last the rays were caught in the mesh of the rising spray and shattered into a thousand rainbows and dashed into myriad gems. It was a miracle of beauty.

The sun dipped lingeringly into the sea. As it sank, a liquid road of light, a pulsing avenue of gold shot from the stern of the ship clear across the foam-capped waves down to the setting sun. The sun seemed a giant portal, cut into the deep-blue wall of the sky, through whose open doors one had a raptured glimpse of a paradise of peace. And as I gazed, I thought how sweet it would be to turn the ship around and sail down that blazing way straight through the open portal of the sun into the Home of the Angels. But our path ran east, not west. Our course led to war, not peace. And as if in answer to my thought, it seemed to me that a mighty cherub, with fulminating wings and in shimmering red, stepped up, stood, and then slowly, sadly closed the doors. The sun was gone.

Noiselessly then the night came down. The opal flares in the pearl-gray west faded, dimmed, and died. Darkness. One by one the stars gleamed forth; the

only lights in all this vast illimitable immensity of water and sky.

Not a gleam from the ships. They sailed along like melting shadows. And not a sound, naught but the deep heave of the ocean. I was all alone with infinitude. Never did I feel so lost, so insignificant, so utterly the sport of chance. These very stars had witnessed the dawn of the earth, ages before the birth of man. And they would still be there in this same changeless splendor when the last man gasped his dying breath.

And beyond these stars is God. And what is puny man and his puny war before His ageless, deathless, all-encompassing infinity? I felt crushed, and yet I knew that we were the children of His love, reared in the palm of His hand. At this very moment He was watching over us with a father's tenderest care. I bowed my head. *De profundis, Domine.*

Phantomlike, our fleet of shadows floated through the night.

During the following days everybody became acquainted with everybody else. The organization aboard was a Kentucky regiment, with Father Price, a fine and lovable man, as their chaplain. Three other chaplains occupied the same cabin with me: Fathers Harry J. Hackett, Charles H. Kane, and Frederick J. Holloran. Naturally, we were together much of the time.

My beard caused a considerable amount of per-



plexity in the minds of officers and men as to what faith I represented. The beard had been trimmed to a Van Dyke; but it was, nevertheless, foreign to accepted military custom. I had thought of removing it in New York; but the photograph on my certificate of identity showed me with a beard, and this constrained me to keep it, at least until I reached the other side of the Atlantic. It always amused me to have officers speak with me and watch their adroit maneuvering of the conversation until they came to the point where they felt they could ask me the question without offense: "To what denomination do you belong, Chaplain?" And I could never quite suppress a smile when, after telling them, I would invariably see them lift their eyebrows in such evident and unfeigned surprise.

The routine of military life demanded boat drills and inspection of arms, but otherwise we did pretty much as we liked. Orders were issued that all enlisted men go about minus their woolen spirals; because, if the ship were torpedoed and the men had to take to the water, the spirals would shrink and impede the circulation of blood in the feet. They were a slouchy-looking lot this way. And all, from highest officers down to buck privates, were directed to wear their life belts constantly, even at meals and when asleep. We all looked and felt ridiculous, parading about in our "cork vests," a continual reminder of the danger we were in.

The perpetual topic of conversation was shop: war and submarines. All eyes were watching for the latter. Lookouts were everlastingly on the alert for the first glimpse of the seemingly ubiquitous sub. When we entered the submarine zone proper, guards were posted all over the ship.

Friday came. Friday was bad enough, but it also happened to be the thirteenth of the month; and that seemed fatal. Half the vessel believed we were going to the bottom of the sea that day. Superstition was rampant, but nothing occurred; and so the men forgot all about the evil omen!

On Sunday, I read Mass in my cabin, using the washstand as an improvised altar. Father Price held services in the noncoms' dining hall. Meanwhile, the other chaplains heard confessions, seated at a long table. The men knelt before them, and were not embarrassed when their buddies knelt on the opposite side of the table not three feet away. The war killed false self-respect, and the danger brought many back to a fuller realization of their Christian duties.

The danger grew thicker the farther we sailed. The atmosphere seemed charged with it. Nerves were tenser. We thought submarine, talked submarine, ate submarine, and dreamed submarine.

About the tenth day, in the morning, a group of us were playing shuffleboard on the deck. We were all absorbed in the game, when suddenly there was a shrill whistle and a shout. My eyes followed the direc-

tion. The lookout near the bridge gesticulated wildly, pointing out across the water toward the center of the convoy.

"Periscope!"

I looked. There, between two ships, cutting through the waves!

My muscles stiffened, and my heart missed a beat. I was glued to the spot, with my eyes riveted on that tube of black.

"Periscope! Periscope!" The word ran up and down the boat like a flash.

I was standing amidships! If the sub turned to us, I was doomed!

One second. Two seconds.

Every moment I expected an aft-gun to bark and spit fire.

Three seconds. Four.

Shoot, man, *shoot!* What are you waiting for?

Five. Six.

What's the matter with that gunner? Is he asleep?

Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten.

Good Heaven! Can't he *see*? Will he never wake up? A peculiar feeling crept up my neck and tingled in the roots of my hair! If that sub—

"What are you looking at, Chaplain?"

A voice spoke at my side. Without turning I answered: "There's a periscope!"

And the voice answered back: "I've been watching that thing for the last ten minutes, wondering what it is."



I looked at the speaker. "Ten minutes! Why—then it's no U-boat!"

We looked at each other and grinned. A false alarm! I drew a deep breath.

"What is it, I wonder?"

"I don't know, Chaplain, but here comes the deck steward; perhaps he can tell us." He stopped the man.

"Can you tell us what that thing is out there between those two ships, about a ship's length behind the boat to our right? It looks like a periscope, and we thought we were in for a submarine attack."

"That? That's a fog signal!"

"A fog signal?" I gasped. The only kind of fog signal I knew was a siren.

"Yes, sir, a fog signal. We were trailing one behind our boat for awhile, just to see that it worked. It's back on deck now. You might take a look at it. It's a simple thing."

It *was* simple. Too simple, in fact, after the scare that had rippled up my spine. We saw a beam of wood, about twenty feet long, twelve by twelve inches thick. About five feet from the farther end, a beam about eight feet long rose perpendicularly. Heavy sheet metal extended from this to the main beam shaped like a plow. In a very heavy fog, where the ships could not be distinguished save when very close, there was grave danger of collision. So each would trail this "fog signal" a few hundred feet be-

hind its stern. The lookout in the bow of the following ship would scan the surface for the splash of water caused by the periscopelike elevated beam and know the exact position of the ship ahead. Rather ingenious, and very simple.

But, when I looked out over the sea a short while ago, I had the sensation of seeing the *real* periscope of a *real* submarine. And, though scared, I remained cool and free from panic; that was something worth knowing. Well, after all, better to be thrilled than killed!

That night we ran into the teeth of a gale.

The storm rose high and higher. The wind screeched and howled, and waves piled up to mountains. They rushed along at a furious speed and pounded against the ship. Like a host of snarling fiends, escaped from the nether worlds, they lunged at the ship with ghoulish hands, bent on clawing it down to the depths. The boat groaned and squirmed, plowing through the water like a hunted thing. It pitched and rolled; one moment it hung desperately in the air, the next it plunged perilously down.

A night of curses and prayers, but no sleep. We rolled from side to side in our narrow bunks. Tumblers crashed to a million pieces, and our baggage rumbled along the floor. The vessel creaked and cracked from end to end, as if it were ripping all its seams. Men walked about like ghosts, and the deep-voiced siren boomed and bellowed like a soul lost in the wilds. The end of the world seemed nigh.

The night passed, and another day began. The more adventurous among us dared the deck. There shone the bright, warm, smiling sun, whose golden light I had hardly hoped ever to see again.

We had cut through the worst of the tempest. But the seas were still running high. Towering waves dashed along, shook their gigantic bulk in anger, and broke into sheets of seething, boiling foam. The convoy had become somewhat scattered, and one of the boats limped along in the far distance. All of them were pitching badly in the tremendous roll of the swells. Thank God, *that* was over!

The eleventh day of our voyage, the morning grew cold, and snow flurries swished and skirled around the boat and over the waves. We must have gone far north.

That afternoon the American battleship and the destroyer made an about-face and steamed away. We felt lost, lonesome, forsaken. It seemed as if our two best friends had deserted us in the hour of our direst need. True, the British battleship still remained with us. But, it occupied the "center of protection" in the very heart of the convoy, and we failed to see how it could help us in case of a submarine attack; because a submarine would surely appear somewhere outside the periphery of the circle of troop ships. With fear we went to sleep.

The next morning British subchasers were scooting and scouting all around us, and there loomed the north coast of Ireland! Someone remarked, reverently



and devoutly: "Isn't it fine and green?" He must have been Irish.

The majority of us, however, could work up no interest in the greenness of Ireland's coast line. The long voyage, seasickness, lack of sleep, the constant danger of submarines, the fury of the storm, all had frayed our nerves and put us on edge. We were anxious to get off "the old tub," but we still had a day of beauty ahead of us.

We steamed down the North Channel. Half of the convoy kept on its way to Liverpool, while the rest of us swung into the Firth of Clyde. We rounded Arron Island and skirted the Cumbræes, and as we rode up the Firth and along the River Clyde, distant vistas of majestic grandeur melted unexpectedly into intimate scenes of most delightful beauty. The view presented a wildly indented landscape, lochs and rivers meeting the Clyde from all sides, picturesque and magnificent, in a late-summer glory.

That evening, for the first time since we left New York, our military band appeared on deck. How those boys played! With wonderful verve and dash! With a madness of joy! The doughboys shouted and sang and danced! Stern military discipline relaxed and smiled.

At one o'clock Saturday morning, September 21, we swerved up to the dock.

Glasgow!

It was our last night on board the Grampian. We felt tired, but very happy.

And peace came down with sleep.

### CHAPTER III

## TO THE HEART OF THE WORLD

And so we landed in Scotland.

Glasgow was about the last place under the sun that we expected as our destination. I never dreamed that ocean-going steamers could travel so far inland. But here we were.

That morning, American Army officials came on board to review our papers. As mine were passing inspection, I showed my sealed envelope to the officer.

"What do I do with this?"

"Keep it, Chaplain, until officially called for. You're still on your way. All casual officers will report at the railway station tonight at eight. A special train will take you. Orders."

"Whereto?"

"I don't know."

Was it really sublime ignorance, or just plain military secrecy? After all, it made little difference; we were in the Army now.

Fathers Hackett, Holloran, and Kane were traveling, like myself, as casuals; so we decided to make a party of four as long as we could stay together. At noon, I stepped for the first time on European soil.

Some wag on the boat had told us, with a very

conspicuous wink of his right eye, that Glasgow was a peculiar place: it rained here three hundred and sixty-five days in the year; and in leap years, three hundred and sixty-seven. A few drops of rain really fell; no doubt, just to uphold the international reputation of Glasgow.

Glasgow was interesting in its odd mixture of old and new; in its quaint blending of up-to-date progress and old-world conditions. Some streets and structures dated back into pre-Reformation days, when Catholic life still ruled in glory. It gave a tinge of retrospective sadness to my musings. Who knows—*transeunt tempora!* Some day, perhaps, another St. Ninian will march up and down the Scottish highlands and lowlands and bring this sturdy race back again into the one great fold in which it had prospered for upwards of a thousand years. And another St. Kentigern will walk again down the aisle of the grand Gothic cathedral amid the joyous shouts of Glasgow's million people, the vast edifice echoing with a triumphant anthem proclaiming the ancient Faith.

That night at eight we were on our train, which promptly moved out. The passengers consisted entirely of nurses and casual officers. We chatted for awhile and then leaned back, to snatch some sleep. The train tore along the rails and thundered through the night.

There was not a drop of water in our car. The trip would apparently be an all-night affair, and, since half the personnel in our car consisted of nurses, caustic comments were made on British service and hospital-



ity. But we managed to help ourselves. The next morning the train stopped at Swindon for about ten minutes. We all got out to ease our cramped limbs. On the platform stood a very large milkcan. One of the officers lifted the cover and looked in; his face had a disgusted appearance. Another addressed him.

"Milk?"

"No."

"Coffee?"

"No. Darn plain water!"

"Why, that's all right, Lieutenant. I prefer water just now to a breakfast. Let's kidnap it!"

The two huskies spirited the milkcan with its precious contents into the car, locked the door, and stood guard. So, when the train again puffed on its way, we had plenty of water for drinking and other purposes; the officers could make their morning ablutions and the nurses their Sunday toilet. For this was Sunday morning, September 22; only to us, the four chaplains, it did not appear to be Sunday.

We passed through farmlands which seemed to have been cut and carved with a huge knife and then put together into pleasing patterns of many colors. Through stretches of downs, rolling away with an easy grace to the horizon, melting their delicate tints with the hazy blue of the autumn sky. Along brooks and rivulets that ambled leisurely through the water-meadows, like green and silver ribbons that floated in a languid breeze. Towns and hamlets nestled in the cozy corners of the hills, their quaint and pretty little

cottages with lawns and gardens and boxhedges being, to all appearances, like pictures taken bodily from an artist's landscape-book and dropped along the countryside.

It made me forget that I had no breakfast, and the time passed most pleasantly. Shortly, after noon, the train stopped.

"All out! Southampton."

Ah! Southampton. Next door to France. Fine!

We officers were lined up four abreast and marched out to a "rest camp" about four miles away. "Rest camp" sounded good, and I felt that a long rest would do no harm. This first march had given me a beautiful blister on my right heel, so I spent the afternoon nursing it and writing to mother.

However, there was no time for rest: the next afternoon orders came to cross the Channel! On account of my blistered heel they allowed me to ride on the baggage truck. Someone shouted: "Lucky beggar!"

I waved my hand and laughed.

We immediately boarded the boat waiting for us at the dock. The officers were quartered on the deck and the enlisted men below. Little cabins opened onto the deck, each containing two beds, which were assigned among the officers. Luck did not favor me with one. Like orphans, the rest of us were doomed to wander about the ship all night, without a place to sit or lie down. I had resigned myself to my fate, when an officer approached me.

"Got a bed, Chaplain?"

"No, sir, I haven't."

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll divide the time with you. You can have the bed either till midnight, or from midnight till morning. Which do you want?"

"Well, sir, if you're satisfied, I would prefer the time from midnight on."

"Suits me. We'll do it that way."

He led me to his cabin and showed me his bed. I thanked him most genuinely. He was a true brother-in-arms.

In the late afternoon we steamed down the Bay. A British destroyer served as our guide and guard. On the way, three British submarines passed us, conning towers awash; they were coming in and we were going out.

Night had draped the world in shadows, when we entered the Pas de Calais. A beautiful night. Too beautiful, in fact, to cross the Channel in time of war, with the German submarine bases so near at Ostend and Zeebrugge. The stars were out, and a lovely moon hung in the sky. It cast its pale, silvery beams upon the waters and wove a magic veil of delicate beauty over the ship. There was no storm, not even the sigh of a wind. I had expected a choppy sea, tossing sheets of spray into the air, but the Channel was unusually calm. Short rolling swells, with just a slight curling foam in places. No lashing of waves; naught but a soft swish, as our bow dipped and rose. Some



distance ahead we could see the destroyer—a few dim lights and a shadowy silhouette. It was a weird ride, creeping along so stealthily in the moonlit night.

The night seemed to me ideal for submarines. Good visibility and a calm sea. Perhaps even at that very moment a periscope watched us with its cyclopean eye, maneuvering to send a torpedo foam-streaking into the bowels of our ship. I pitied the cargo of human freight we carried below, stacked and packed like cattle in a pen. They would not have a chance in the world. It would be a holocaust of souls! God avert it!

Time passed heavily. It must have been close to eleven o'clock, when we sighted a beacon on the French coast. The pulsing ray bade us welcome, and soon the outline of the shore loomed black against the sky. Dim lights. Voices. The dock. And we were anchored. Midnight.

I woke my friend with the bed, took his place, and slept till morning; only then were we allowed ashore. With a feeling of happiness, mingled with apprehension, I put my foot upon the Continent. We landed at Le Havre.

France! Over there!

Le Havre, too, had an English rest camp somewhere out in the hills. Men and officers were lined up, to march out to this camp. My raw heel proved a boon again; I rode out on a truck and arrived in ad-

vance of the others. Limping back a short distance, I watched them come up the road and climb the hill.

The officers marched in first, and then came a regiment of soldiers. The yellow-gray dust of the dry road, pounded up by the heavy, hobnailed shoes of the infantry, hung over them in a cloud. The dim, shadowy figures of the soldiers moved like phantom souls of Dante's *Inferno*. The regiment seemed a gigantic dragon, laboriously twisting and squirming along, dragging its wounded body painfully up the hill.

That hill was back-breaking. When they arrived at the top they rested. The sight of those soldiers standing there presented a picture horrible enough to make an angel curse the war. They leaned heavily on their rifles. Their bodies sagged, trembled, almost bent in two under the weight of the 70-pound pack which they had shouldered up that monstrous hill. Their uniforms wore a thick powder of dust. Their faces looked hideously ugly with the sweat streaming down in little rills, mixing with the dust plastered thickly upon them, forming a gluey, nasty paste. Their eyes were pinched together into a straight, stern line, and their eyebrows lifted high up, causing deep, dark furrows over the brow. Their nostrils flared wide open, dilating and closing in short, quick spasms. The worst was the mouth; their lips were drawn away from the teeth as far as possible, up and down and to both sides, with the teeth clenched and gritted closely together,

through which the hissing breath came and went in hard, sharp rasps. Their hunched shoulders heaved convulsively with every panting breath. They looked like gruesome gargoyles making fiendish grimaces, like snarling beasts of prey crouching for the death spring.

And yet, they were but soldier boys, American lads; lads from wonderful homes and from the best of families; educated, cultured, tender-hearted; without a thought of malice or hatred for anyone; brothers to sisters and sons to mothers. Good that no mother saw her boy this morning; she would have swooned. It had been a brutally cruel march, a veritable torture. But—such is war! And I hated it. I turned away, for tears bit my eyes. Poor lads! And these were but the preliminary steps that led to the battle lines! *There* was the real test of men.

We four chaplains stayed at this camp near Le Havre, from Tuesday until Friday afternoon.

Upon our arrival we were quartered, with four other officers, in one of the round English tents. It had a board floor, and that was all. That night I slept for the first time on plain wood. I never knew before that wooden floors could be so hard; and I never realized so well that I had hips and shoulders and a neck. Vainly I tried all night to find some forgotten soft spot of my body, that was not bruised and sore. And it rained. The rain drummed upon the canvas roof of the tent with a noise like a tom-tom. Through holes



in the canvas little rills of rain would drip-drop into one's eyes and down one's neck. To cap it all, the aviators were called out at two o'clock in the morning to resume their trip; and they did not tiptoe, nor did they whisper. My first night in la belle France was anything but pleasant. The second night I slept half the hours, and the third night I forgot about boards and bones.

After three monotonous days, we four rejoiced when the authorities ordered us, Friday morning, to travel to G. H. Q. at Chaumont.

I asked innocently: "What is G. H. Q.?"

The officer looked at me in pained surprise, and answered blandly: "General Headquarters."

"Oh!" I regretted my question instantly, for I had displayed an abysmal ignorance of things military in their most elementary form.

General Headquarters! So we were to see the brain center of the American Expeditionary Forces! That alone was worth a trip to France. We were happy to leave that afternoon.

"Paree—ee!" Paris. The famous and infamous. The heart of France. The home of sinner and saint. The city of the highest and lowest. The metropolis of civilization and decadence.

We arrived early Saturday morning, and were allowed a day stop-over. Father Kane, who had studied in Europe, was acquainted with Paris, so we followed him as lambs follow the bellwether. He led

us to the Hotel Continental where he and I took a room, and Frs. Holloran and Hackett took another. Then we had breakfast.

Food was a serious matter at the time in France. We possessed bread tickets, so we had no fear on that score. Here is what we received: a quarter slice of cantaloupe, a cup of black coffee, a minute piece of ham, two eggs, and a piece of bread. Rather generous. I asked the waiter for sugar. He gave me a little container with liquid saccharin; the Government allowed the hotels no rations of sugar. "Cream or milk?"

"But, monsieur, we never have milk or cream." He threw up his hands in an eloquent gesture, and said with a sigh: "C'est la guerre!—It is the war!"

This was the first time I had heard an expression, that I encountered a thousand times thereafter, with every conceivable inflection of voice and shade of meaning.

Was the bread half-baked, the wine too sour, or the chicken too tough? C'est la guerre! Was there a scarcity of things, or a superabundance; prices too high or too low? C'est la guerre! Were the streets dirty or the roads humpy? Was it cold or did it rain? C'est la guerre! It was the all-sufficient explanation.

I came to Paris with all the congenital naïveté of "The Innocents Abroad," and I was unashamed of the fact. I *wished* to be thrilled. I *desired* to see a land of enchantment. I *wanted* to discover a new world. And I had but one day to do it in; because I did not know whether I could ever see it again. In this spirit I sauntered forth in my quest of beauty.

Paris was indeed a city of wonders. We walked over to the Garden of the Tuileries and looked back. There stood Napoleon's Arc du Carrousel, built by him to memorialize his victories of 1805 and 1806. Behind it stood the Palace of the Tuileries, like a giant, extending its two great arms as if welcoming us strangers. The Tuileries! It embodied the triumph and the tragedy of a nation. The infuriated mob of Paris had swarmed around it in a whirlwind of hate, stormed and sacked it, led the King away, and placed his head under the blood-dripping guillotine! Napoleon had defended it, routing the National Guard, and became the Dictator of France.

We turned into the Place de la Concorde, now bristling with German guns of every caliber and description, and strolled up the Champs Élysées. I cannot think of anything more splendid in the heart of any city than this course that runs from the Place de la Concorde to the Étoile.

We reached the Étoile and stood beneath the Arc de Triomphe. A colossal monument of Napoleon to Napoleon. A circle of captured German cannons guarded the structure. Only once in a hundred years has an army marched beneath its majestic arches—the Germans in 1871. Would the German divisions again thunder victoriously through the Arc down the Champs Élysées? Not if America could avert the calamity, and I felt proud to be an American.

A dozen beautiful avenues radiate in all directions from the Étoile, the "Star." We took the direction to the Champ de Mars. There the Eiffel, the tower of this



modern Babylon, symbolizing the aspirations of this God-gifted people, shot up its titanic greatness into the sky. It reminded me of the day in the beginning of the Revolution, when over three hundred thousand crowded into this field around the Altar of the Nation to celebrate the festival of the Federation. King, clergy, and people swore allegiance. Then, amid the rolling of drums, and the thunder of guns, and the thrill of martial music, that vast assembly broke out into the jubilant cry: "Long live the Nation! Long live its King!" Their hopes of peace and happiness also rose up to the heavens; and then came the blood-drenched Days of Terror!

We passed on. In the distance we could see the Trocadero, with its beautiful approach, like a huge winged crescent. But time was precious, so we hailed a taxi.

"Whereto?"

"Anywhere—everywhere."

"Bois de Boulogne?"

"Oui."

We drove in our wheezy, rickety taxi over this most fashionable of driveways. The Bois still stood in green, but the boulevards were empty. The War had absorbed everything.

We rode on and passed the Madeleine in its classic Grecian style and through the Place de l' Opera; zig-zagged through various avenues to the Place de la Bastille and the Place de la Republique, where the guillotine had done its murderous work in the Revolu-

tion, and deluged Paris with the blood of its best and worst citizens. The very pavement shouted up to us the history of bygone days, centuries of glory and years of poignant tragedy.

We made a special trip in the afternoon to the Cathedral of Notre Dame, situated on an island in the Seine, the Ile de la Cité.

Standing in the square before the Cathedral, I was overpowered, overawed. A scene of sheerest beauty met my gaze. A symphony of line and rhythm. A prayer in stone. A poem. It seemed hardly possible that the genius of man could conceive such a stupendous edifice or that the hand of man could execute it. But there it rose, as if growing out of the very soil, the flower of the land and the soul of the country: the embodiment of the spirit of the nation—delicate, artistic, spiritual, faith-inspired; and then, too, grand, magnificent, majestic, unconquerable. Here indeed was the pulsing heart of Paris and of all France.

This marvelous Cathedral witnessed seven centuries of war-fraught history break their force against its venerable and impregnable foundations. It echoed and reechoed with the joyous acclamations of a jubilant population at the crowning of its kings; it wailed with the doleful dirges of requiems as the funeral cortege led their earthly remains away to the darkness of the tomb. It resounded to the spirited roll of drums, the fanfare of trumpets, and the clanging of steel, when the victorious armies returned to sing a thunderous *Te Deum* after the triumph of battle. It sorrowed

in horror, when the fiendish canaille of the Revolution pressed through its portals into the Holy of Holies, looted the treasury, smashed the beauty of its sanctuary, and committed the ultimate blasphemy of placing a dancing harlot upon the altar of the Most High and adoring her as the Goddess of Reason, amid ribaldry and obscenity that was an outrage flung into the very face of God. It saw kingdoms come, kingdoms go; nations rise, nations fall; worlds won, worlds lost. It had already seen three centuries, when Columbus braved the uncharted ocean to discover a new continent; when the Reformation blasted away a big portion of the Rock of Peter; when England built her fleet and became the mistress of the seven seas. And at this moment the civilized world was crumbling to pieces, not so many leagues away, in the cataclysmic destruction of the World War; but the cathedral stood there in all the imperturbable serenity of deathless art. I felt very small in the presence of this grandeur and majesty, a mere mote blown by the winds of circumstance and dropped down here before this mighty masterpiece of Catholic faith and devotion. And my heart was very humble as I stepped up to the portal with its exquisite carving of the Last Judgment, and passed inside.

I seemed to have entered another sphere. The noise of Parisian traffic faded and died. Here was quietude, tranquillity, peace, an atmosphere of other-worldliness, a corner of heaven. I felt lost in all that length and depth and height. Only as I walked down the



nave to the transept, did I begin to realize the immensity of construction. There were whispering silences that spoke to one's soul, and the soul appeared to be lifted out of itself, to soar to the heights of God. And as I gazed at the rosette windows in the transepts, through which the light was broken into a million rainbows of mellow colors, I thought I looked straight through the veil of time into the heart of eternity. Earth vanished, and heaven drew intimately near.

That night we roamed the boulevards. Paris no longer seemed Paris. Gone were the bright, sunlit avenues; everything looked dismal and dreary. *C'est la guerre!*

The world had never seen Paris in this mood until the coming of the Zeppelins and Gothas. Illumination was held down to a barest minimum. Street lamps were coated with blue coloring, giving an effect altogether weird, ghastly. Paris appeared a city of the dead. Whoever chanced to be out among the civilians, hugged the walls of the buildings, ready at a moment's notice to rush into doorways and subways. Taxies alone drove through the streets, with the dimmest of headlights burning.

Silence hung heavily over the city. The far-famed gaiety of Parisian night life was conspicuously absent. Shades of cafes were drawn down tight; no one sat outside at the little round tables; and nowhere did one hear an orchestra. A silent, sober Paris, but not asleep.

From the tops of high buildings, searchlights were playing shafts of dense beams upon the clouds in the sky. From different corners of the city, flashes of light would shoot up like gigantic fingers. Slowly and steadily they swept the horizon in wide graceful arcs, mounting and mounting, meeting and crossing and separating, until they reached the zenith, raking the sky for a glimpse of the enemy craft. And the sirens on the buildings were ever ready to shriek, and the archies always prepared to bark, sending their message of death. But there was no air raid that night.

We went back to the Continental and retired.

I had made only a flying trip through Paris. However, even with that I could understand the charm and fascination it exerted over the minds of men, making it the Mecca of the nations. Historically, socially, and artistically it was the center of modern civilization and the capital of modern culture. Indeed, the Heart of the World.

I had found my land of enchantment and discovered my new world in the bosom of the old. I was thrilled.

Through my window I could see the searchlights of Paris combing the heavens.

## CHAPTER IV

G. H. Q.—S. O. S.

Next day was Sunday. Our train for Chaumont left at an early hour; so this time, at least, we would travel in daylight. After a hurried breakfast we taxied to the station, and soon were off. Paris was leaving us.

We passed through the suburbs; through the neighboring towns and hamlets; and out into the rolling, sweeping, well-cultivated countryside of *la belle France*. Along the route one could see groups of men, women, and children, leisurely wending their way to church. And here and there one could also observe a violator of the Day of the Lord, working his field or driving his team.

The telegraph posts danced by in a dizzy, drunken orgy, and the fields shot past in a green and brown blur. Sleepy little towns lay out there, dozing in the Sunday sun, and along the horizon the hills alone stood still, like drowsy soldiers on a lonely post.

And thus we rolled along, coming closer and closer to our final destiny. Soon we would be there, at the end of the long trail. A thousand miles to the coast; a dash across the sea; a race through three countries; and now—"Chaumont—Chaumont!"



At last! A slowing down of the train, a final jolt, and we had arrived.

On the platform stood a solitary M.P.—a fine specimen of American manhood, lithe and lean; broad of shoulders and slender of waist; face tanned, sharp, leathery; eyes bright, keen, alert. He wore the wide-brimmed campaign hat; on his arm was the M.P. brassard (Military Police); a cartridge belt with a holster containing a sinister .45 automatic encircled his waist. He represented the majesty of American law. So we approached him.

“How do we get to G. H. Q.?”

“When you pass through the station, you’ll find a small open space leading up to the street; near the street, at the left, you’ll notice the R. T. O.’s office, where you’ll get all information.”

Now what is “R. T. O.” anyhow? Luckily I did not have to display my ignorance again. For when we came to the open space, I spied a little booth at the left with a sign on its front: “Railway Transportation Officer.” Simple enough.

We showed our orders, received our directions, and then entered the town. Although it was now afternoon, the Hôtel de la France made up a luncheon for us. That over, we sought our way to Headquarters. G. H. Q. was directly outside the town.

A tremendous beehive of military activity. Guards with bayonnetted rifles stationed everywhere, stepping off their posts in slow, measured tread. M.P.’s standing along the roads directing traffic. Hosts of motor

cars tearing down the roads in clouds of dust, horns screaming for the right of way. High-ranking officers dashing to and fro. Begoggled and mud-spattered motorcycle couriers scorching in, and then streaking away again.

That is what I *expected* G. H. Q. to be. It was nothing of that sort. A very quiet place, peaceful and orderly; with a moderate number of soldiers about, and no high-ranking officers. Naturally. The Commander-in-Chief and his staff were up closer to the front, directing the Meuse-Argonne battle somewhere in the vicinity of Verdun; they would not be back here. And thus one great illusion of my woefully un-military mind dissolved into mist and floated away.

We reported at the A. E. F. Senior Chaplain's office. Chaplain Moody took charge of us—a very likable and pleasant man, with a big shining silver cross on his shoulder strap. He had a close-cropped mustache, so I knew he could not be Catholic.

"Be seated, gentlemen. Welcome to France and to Headquarters. Now your names, if you please."

We gave him our names.

"All Catholic chaplains?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fine. I am sorry Father Francis Daugherty is not here at present, the Senior Catholic Chaplain. He is out on an inspection tour, but I think we can fix you up all right."

He gave an orderly some brief instructions, and then turned to us again and asked about our trip. He

was very kind and affable and made us feel at home. Finally he said:

"I am very glad you came. We need Catholic chaplains. The soldiers are coming to France in such large numbers of late, that there is a positive dearth of chaplains. So we will put you to work very soon."

This was good news indeed. Just then the orderly came in. "The car is ready, sir."

"Fine. Now, gentlemen, a car is waiting outside to take you to the Chaplains' Training School. This way, please."

We went outside, stepped into an army car, and whizzed away through the countryside. Up and down hill. On all sides beautiful fields and woods. We saw Pershing's château about a half mile away, a stately structure, half-hidden among the trees. After a number of miles, we stopped at another château, rather old and unpretentious, the Chaplains' Training School.

An officer came out to welcome us, a chaplain; a big man, sturdy, thick-set, about fifty. He ushered us in, and explained that the school had just been transferred to another section of France. We would receive no intensive training, therefore; but he would explain things to us in a series of short lectures.

When we were alone, we talked this situation over. No intensive training? Of course, if it meant that we would be sent up to the front without much ado, now that a big drive was on, it would mean a stroke of good fortune. But, if —. Well, we could think of no other alternative, and so we felt rather delighted



at the prospect of soon being with the troops in the lines.

The lecture our instructor gave us that evening confirmed us in this happy frame of mind. We should take a few good pairs of heavy socks with us, when going to the front; a pair of ordinary issue shoes, thoroughly greased, and good underwear. We had better take a plain issue uniform with woolen spirals, for trench duty. He spoke of a pack and what we should carry in it; about gas masks. He dwelt at quite some length upon the activity of the chaplain in the battle zone and explained that his place is really the first-aid dressing station rather than the front line itself; because all the wounded will pass through this station and they are the ones that need immediate spiritual help. As for courage, the chaplain should use common sense and not heroics. All very sane and practical.

That evening I stood at the window of my room. Here I was, after a hectic trip of five thousand miles; in France; at G. H. Q.; in an ancient château.

The night flowed in. Warm, soft, and still. The trees sighed, a bird chirped, and far away a dog wailed; and then, a sweet, deep silence. The sky seemed washed, and the stars shone down in a startling brilliance. Here they gazed upon a scene of bucolic peace; and a little farther north they looked at guns stabbing the night with piercing flames, at men twisting in torture and groaning out their souls in pain.

Would I be there soon, in that boiling vortex of blood and bodies? Perhaps, some day, beneath a little mound of earth, waiting for the great Angel to stand on the rim of the world and blow his silver bugle, waking up that vast host asleep in the bivouacs of death, for the Grand Reveille? I wondered——.

The next day was given over to a number of talks and instructions by the chaplain in charge. The identification of fallen soldiers; their burial; the marking of the grave; the position of the graves; the personal effects of the dead; the notification of the Central Records Office; writing to the soldier's family. And then he spoke on the routine work of a chaplain: official correspondence; reports; general duties; relation to officers and men. He closed with a plea to grasp the spirit of this great movement with heart and soul. His final words were:

“Be a Christian gentleman at all times.”

He had been kind-hearted and patient amid all the wise and unwise questions flung at him, and we were very grateful to him.

Late that afternoon we drove back to Headquarters. On the way in, my brain worked feverishly. I was keyed to a high pitch, in a whirl of excitement, for I knew that now we were to learn our fate.

Shortly after our arrival, Chaplain Moody called us. He sat at his desk, little papers in his hand. My heart pounded like a trip hammer; I felt hot.

Fathers Holloran, Hackett, and Kane were ordered to Base Sections.

“And you, sir—.”

I stepped forward.

“You will report to Senior Chaplain Major G. Stull at Nevers for duty in the Intermediate Section.”

So none of us were going to the front! I felt my heart stop, and I thought it would never start again. My blood ran cold. We stood there like stone. The Senior Chaplain noticed it. He spoke, gently, softly, delicately:

“Gentlemen, I know how you feel. You expected to go to the lines, to battle. Your desire is a credit to your spirit and good will. But, we cannot all go. Some of us must stay behind. Here I am, at a desk! Do you not think I prefer to be among the men in the lines or in a camp? But I have been ordered to do this work. Consider, gentlemen. There are hospitals and camps in the Base and Intermediate Sections, which have no chaplains. These men who have souls, too, need you, and are waiting for you. You have a splendid field of labor.”

Ah, yes, we understood. The first shock subsided. We were ready to go wherever needed. But we had never thought of the rear. Our idea of war had been fighting zones, trenches, battles. And we had been so willing! There was something truly pathetic about this little tragedy of our vanished hopes. We smiled the pitiful smile of duty. *C'est la guerre!* We thanked the Senior Chaplain, and departed.

That night we took the train south. It was the



"American Special," American-manned, for American soldiers. It even had a French Pullman, a "wagon-lit"; the first I had seen. We stepped in. A colored porter, in a soldier's uniform, greeted us.

"Good evenin,' gent'men. Has yo' all got cahds foh a be'th?"

We looked at each other. "Why, no. Must we have a card?"

"Yo' is supposed to, suh. But dat's awright. Ah's got some beds left ovah. Jes' follow me."

He gave a compartment to Father Kane and myself; the other two received another. I rather liked the privacy of a special compartment. We went to bed.

I felt very tired. And soul weary. Almost heart-sick. The disappointment had cut too deep. I lay there, thinking. My little world had to be readjusted. My dream was shattered, and my vision had crumbled.

Then, as I thought there in the darkness, it seemed to me that a form took shape, slowly, painfully—a thorn-crowned head—with eyes of infinite pity. And I felt ashamed.

Ah, yes—duty is duty, and the Lord knows best. Wherever His service takes us, there we must be. His vineyards extend, too, into the areas of the rear; not merely at the front.

"*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis. . . .*"

Souls, Lord, souls! Not medals.

About noon the next day we arrived at Nevers,

where I had to say farewell to the other three chaplains. They would go on. The companionship of these exciting weeks had made us pals; and now duty stepped in between. We gripped hands.

The train pulled out and left me alone. I walked to the R. T. O. and presented my orders. The bang of a rubber stamp on the paper, and I could enter the city.

"Where can I find the Senior Chaplain's office, Sergeant?"

"Why, let me see. Somewhere up around the Cathedral, sir. Just go up the street ahead of you, until you hit the square. The Cathedral will be to your right, on top of the little hill there. You can't miss it."

I took luncheon at a cafe, and then went in search of the Cathedral. I found it easy enough; but where could the Chaplain's office be? I walked around the Cathedral. Nothing. Over to the Ducal Palace. Nothing. Down the Place de la Republique. Nothing. Now where? Leisurely I strolled back to the Place Carnot at the foot of the hill, where I saw an M.P.

"Can you tell me where Senior Chaplain Stull's office is?"

"Up there near the Cathedral."

"I looked for it and couldn't find it."

"See the Ducal Palace up there?"

"Yes."

"Well, pass that. It's at the left of the palace, right at the head of one of the side streets."

"Merci."

And there I found it, 25 Rue de Recollets. A little sign above the door indicated the place. On the second floor another little sign, tacked to the door frame, read: "Chaplain's Office." I rapped and walked in.

It was a fair-size room, devoid of all ornamentation. Two soldiers were clicking typewriters. The Senior Chaplain sat behind a desk. I stepped up and saluted.

"Senior Chaplain, Major Stull?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sir, I wish to report for duty. I . . ."

"Just a second. Are you a Catholic chaplain?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"I want you to do something immediately. Never mind reporting for duty until you get back. There's a Spaniard, a Catholic, very sick in the hospital. In the contagious ward. Go and see him. Do for him whatever you can. Then come back here."

"Where is the hospital?"

"Are you acquainted here in Nevers?"

"No, sir."

"A strange town, and crooked streets; it wouldn't do much good to give you directions. Go anyhow. Ask some soldiers in the streets. You'll get there somehow. I understand it's urgent; so you better hurry."

"Very well, sir."

In a moment I was in the street. Brrrr! That's the army for you! "Go!" And you go. "Come!" And you come. "Do this!" And you do it. But where should I go? I looked about. Across the Place de la Republique I saw an army car with a doughboy at the wheel. I ran to him.



"Say, buddy! I'm in a jam and in a hurry. I've got to go to a sick man in the hospital and I don't know where it is. Do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you take me there in this car?"

"I'm on duty, sir. I'll have to ask the lieutenant."

And he hopped out and was gone. In a minute he came back.

"All right, Chaplain. Jump in!"

I did. The starter whirred, and off we were through the Place Carnot and into the winding streets.

"We'll be there toot-sweet, sir."

And we were. I ordered him to wait till I got back. Entering the hospital I encountered a nurse and told her my mission. She looked puzzled.

"Contagious ward? We have none here. That must be over at the French Barracks."

"And where is that?"

"Why—across the bridge somewhere."

I thanked her and rushed out.

"Buddy, do you know where the French Barracks are?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is where we have to go."

Speed laws did not mean much to this little driver of mine, and not very long after we halted at the Barracks.

I found the building I wanted. A barbed-wire inclosure caged it off and at the entrance there hung a sign: "Contagious Diseases. Keep Out." I walked in. A nurse met me.

"Good day, nurse. Have you a Spanish Catholic here who is quite sick?"

"Yes, Chaplain. Lopez."

"Does anyone here know Spanish? I don't know a word except 'Adios.' "

"Oh, he's an American. A soldier."

"I see! Take me to him, please."

He lay upon his bed in a semicomatose condition. His right arm was off at the elbow. He looked very, very sick indeed.

"Lopez!"

His eyes opened slowly.

"The chaplain has come to see you. I am a priest."

"Oh!—Good day—Father."

I heard his confession and gave him Extreme Unction. For awhile I tried to cheer him along, but his mind soon drifted again into the twilight of semi-consciousness. So, with a blessing, I left.

My chauffeur had gone. Knowing the general direction, I started on my way back. But why walk, when one can ride? I hailed a passing truck and that took me close to the Cathedral. Upon entering the Senior Chaplain's office, he looked up.

"Well, did you find the place and the man?"

"Eventually, yes, sir."

"Rather abrupt business, not?"

"Somewhat."

A most delightful grin wrinkled up his face and he chuckled good-naturedly. I liked the man.

"Now, what is your name, Father?"

I told him, and handed him my orders. We had a very pleasant conversation, in the course of which I admired his adroit questioning. In a comparatively short time he had extracted the high-lights of my personal history. After awhile he said:

"Father, I am going to assign you to the S. O. S. Sounds like a distress signal, doesn't it? But in the army it means Service of Supplies. You will be Chaplain of the Motor Transport Reconstruction Park at Verneuil, to succeed Father Joseph Whitaker."

"And where is Verneuil?"

"Oh, about thirty-five miles from here. Father Whitaker is in town, and I spoke to him this morning. Let's see if I can get him on the phone somewhere."

He finally located him, and had him come over to the office.

Father Whitaker was a tall, slim man, of quiet voice and gentle manner, scholarly and unassuming. A friendly and sympathetic look shone in his dark eyes.

All arrangements made, Father Whitaker and I went out to look at the town. Strolling along the Rue de Commerce, we met two officers from the organization at Verneuil. Capt. Edward Bauer and Lt. (afterwards Capt.) Silk had a car and were leaving for Verneuil at 8:30 P.M. They would be pleased to take us along.

At the appointed time we left Nevers, and at 10 o'clock we reached the camp. It was October 1.



Everything was dark. I saw the dim outline of tents; dull, faint glimmerings shone through the canvas, creating weird blotches of color. There were muffled voices, and somewhere the soft singing of a muted quartette.

We bade our two friends good-night and stepped into Father Whitaker's tent. He lit a smoked-up old barn lantern, that barely illuminated the place. Going to the door—really a *door!*—he said:

“Make yourself at home. I'll go and find some place for you to sleep. All I have is this army cot, and that's hardly wide enough for one.”

The tent was square-shaped, regulation size. The four sides were boarded up to a height of about three or four feet; this afforded more protection and gave more head room. The entire furniture consisted of a cot, an unpainted table, a chair, and a little wood stove. Rather primitive, yet it gave comfort. And this would soon be my home.

A shadow loomed in the doorway. “All right, Father. I found out that Lt. Thornton is away and will not be back tonight. Come along.”

Thornton's tent was but a short distance away. Father Whitaker brought me in, wished me a sound sleep, and departed.

I stepped outside and looked about me. A beautiful sky in a beautiful night. The stars twinkled so peacefully. The same stars that gleamed up at the front, amid the roar of guns and the crash of shells, gazing

down upon the concentrated horror of war. But these stars would never see me up there.

I glanced over the shadowy line of tents. So this would be my field of labor, my corner of God's vineyard. All those souls were placed in my care. Good. I would do my best. *Fiat voluntas Tua*. . . .

Suddenly, clear as silver and soft as velvet, somewhere a bugle sang out a quivering melody, through the stillness of the night. I listened with startled ears. —Taps!

To me the bugle seemed to sing the Song of the World:

“Go to sleep!  
Go to sleep,  
Go to sleep,  
Go to sleep!  
God's above,  
All is well,—  
Peace! and Good-Night!”

And peace came to me, there in my little tent, in the heart of my camp.

## CHAPTER V

### SEVEN—SEVEN—TWO

“So this is the Motor Transport Reconstruction Park!”

The morning after my arrival, Father Whitaker took me out to look over the camp. The land on which we stood formed a large open square, the size of about four city blocks, situated on the top and on the slope of a long hill. Army tents, equally spaced, occupied the greater portion of this square.

On our left and to the rear a grove of trees made a natural boundary, while to the right a road marked the limit line. In front of us, about three hundred feet beyond the lowest row of tents, a highway ran across the slope of the hill, cutting the other road at right angles.

From where we stood, the hill commanded a bird's-eye view of the surrounding country. The whole territory here fell in a long, easy line down into the valley, the flatland of which extended about a mile wide, covered with high grass and brushwood. On the farther side of the valley the small River Aron wound its way. Behind it, and somewhat higher, a canal ran its straight course between artificial embankments, skirted on both sides with tall poplar





Entrance to the Reconstruction Park. Shops at the left. Headquarters and Supply  
Hangars at the right

(U. S. Signal Corps Photo.)



trees set at regular intervals. Beyond the canal the land rose again into hills, somewhat more abrupt than on this side, covered with woods, pastures and farms.

The road to our right cut down the face of the hill and ran straight as an arrow across the valley and over the river and the canal. Striking the foot of the hills in the distance, this road forked out into two sweeping lines which bent out their arcs in either direction among the hills and then bowed toward each other again, meeting in the little village of Verneuil about two miles away from where we stood.

I turned to Father Whitaker. "What outfits are stationed here?"

"The three major Motor Repair Units of the A. E. F.; the 301, 302, and 303, together with the 327. The latter, consisting of about four hundred officers and men, forms the Base Spare Parts Unit."

"Is there any particular arrangement to the tents?"

"Yes, 301 is over there at the right, alongside the road; 302 is the middle; and 303 is here at the left. And over here, entirely to the left and standing by themselves, you see three barracks, which constitute the camp hospital: the one down below is the clinic and the administration building, while the upper two contain the beds for patients."

"And what is on the other side of the road to the right?"

"Among the trees, is the château of Count du Faye. All this stretch of land, on which the camp and the shops are located, belongs to the Count's estate."



"Do you mean to say, Father, that those buildings down there, to the right of the road, belong to this outfit?"

"Certainly. They are the motor repair shops."

"What were they used for when the French had them?"

"The French never had them. This whole complex of buildings, spread out over eight hundred acres, was built by our lads this summer."

I could hardly believe his words.

"But—how did they do it?"

"How? Through sheer American grit. These shops and their construction form a brilliant little chapter in the history of the A. E. F., evidencing the tenacity, the stamina, and the resourcefulness of the American soldier in the face of overpowering obstacles."

"Tell me more about it."

"Well, you see, our shops were first located in the French Barracks at Nevers, the old Caserne Pettie. But the place proved too small, and so Verneuil was selected as the logical site. Last April about two hundred men and a few officers came to build the shops. They first built a railroad about five miles long. Mind you, this was done, not by engineers of the army, but by our own men. The building material came in thousands of carloads and had to be unloaded by hand. The steel beams and trusses had all been made in the United States; in fact, practically the entire buildings had been constructed in sections back in the States, being standardized factory shops. These

trusses, fifty feet long and weighing over thirty-five hundred pounds apiece, had to be carried through mud and dirt for six hundred feet and more. Many were badly twisted in transit, making it necessary to straighten them out. But there were no mechanical tools and appliances with which to do it. Do you know what they did? They heated the steel with ordinary blowtorches; and then with big hammers pounded the trusses back into shape. Now they could begin to put up the buildings."

"And rather large buildings, too."

"Yes. Altogether they total a floor space of over five hundred thousand square feet. The single buildings are anywhere from twenty to thirty feet high, with steel-sash windows and skylights, concrete-base walls and floors throughout. They made and laid the concrete, put all the glass into the windows, and constructed the roofs. And in most cases they fashioned their own tools—at Nevers, of course. So you see, the entire place owes its origin and construction to our men."

"And how long did it take to do the job?"

"In about three months they had it practically finished. Almost overnight the whole organization moved from Nevers to Verneuil at the end of July."

"That was record-breaking time."

"Well, it had to be done. It is really a remarkable organization. From the standpoint of efficiency and completeness of equipment to cope with emergency conditions of the Motor Transport, it is said to be the

biggest field organization in the world. I understand it is a three-hundred-million-dollar outfit."

"Three hundred millions! Whew! How can such an enormous amount of money be sunk into such a small camp?"

"Buildings, machinery, supplies. We have over 700 different kinds of machines. These are the main repair units of the A. E. F. Anything on wheels is repaired here: trucks, automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles, ambulances, field kitchens."

"That's the reason, I suppose, why it is called a Reconstruction Park?"

"Exactly. All wrecked cars are sent down here, and are repaired, if possible. When a car is beyond repair, they salvage the parts to be used in another."

"Where do these cars come from? The front?"

"Mainly. Carloads of wrecks, an average of 45 cars, come here every day. It is the boast of the shops that they are prepared for any emergency: no part too small, no job too large. There isn't a trade that is not represented here. Of course, the men are mostly motor mechanics, of a very high order, hand-picked, you might say. All the men are volunteers, many of them high-salaried men, and there was hardly any danger of most of them being drafted, because they were in industries essential to the carrying on of the war. Yet, they left their jobs, their homes, everything, to come over here. Just to do their bit."

"That is what I call a high grade of patriotism. What you have just told me, proves that not all heroes are up at the front, and that many a man is walking



around unrecognized and unnoticed who ought to have a medal on his breast!"

"Yes, that is true. Not many are acquainted with this Reconstruction Park; and still less realize its importance in the general scheme of things as far as the fighting forces are concerned. I hate to think of what would happen to the Service of Supplies, if the Germans ever learned of this place and sent over a squadron of airplanes to bomb it some night. That would seriously cripple our communications in a little while. Motor vehicles cannot stand up very long under the terrific strain of war conditions. They have spare parts here for every type and make of car and truck; but if they cannot supply a certain part, they simply *manufacture* it, out of raw materials, in order not to waste time waiting for parts to come from the States."

"Did they ever run short seriously?"

"Well, here is an instance of efficiency. At the time of the St. Mihiel drive (or rather just prior to it, I think), any number of trucks went out of commission. Hundreds of trucks were lying by the roadsides, because their steering arms proved to be very brittle and broke off. Here was a very critical emergency condition that could prove fatal to military operations. They could not wait for steering arms from the factories back in America; they needed them immediately, so appealed to our Park. We did not have many on hand, so designs were drawn, dies were cut, and in five days five hundred, and in two weeks thousands of them were ready and in service. That is the type of

work our men are capable of doing, and proves the importance of this organization."

"Indeed, I see it! How many men are in the outfit?"

"About five thousand men and two hundred officers, constituting the 301st, 302nd, and 303rd Repair Units. These are the three first and original units formed in the States to do this reconstruction work."

"Where did these men come from?"

"Oh, from everywhere. Mainly, though, from the great manufacturing centers of the country: Detroit, Akron, Cleveland, Toledo, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Boston. They could not use everybody or anybody, so the selection of these highly skilled mechanics was due to a very hard and intensive campaign covering many months of sustained effort."

"And who is the man behind all this?"

"The present Commanding Officer, Colonel Harry Hegeman."

I was deeply impressed. What an exceptional organization! Not another quite like it in the whole A. E. F. As I looked over the encampment, a feeling of respect surged up within me for the indomitable spirit and courage embodied before my eyes. And again I murmured, as I did in the beginning, when my eyes first met the panorama spread out at my feet:

"So this is the Motor Transport Reconstruction Park!"

"Yes," said Father Whitaker. "Or for short, just plain 772."

"Why 772?"

“One never designates camps over here by name and place; they go by numbers. And ours is 772.”

We lapsed into silence. I let the picture of the camp and the Park sink into my brain.

Just then a bugle called—sharp, brisk, snappy.

“Time for mess. Let’s go.”

“Yes. Let’s.”

The 302 Officers’ Mess was just a plain army barrack. Partitions divided the space of the building into three big rooms: at the one end, the kitchen; at the other end, the lounging room with a big fireplace, a large table, and a few chairs; the middle room served as the mess hall. There were long tables of plain boards, and long benches corresponding to the tables. The place filled rapidly.

The officers were all comparatively young men, in the twenties and thirties, quick of step and speech. Educated. Their sparkling conversation displayed their intelligence. Gentlemen. Their carriage and manners showed their breeding. Goodfellows. Their ready smile and kindly chaff were an indicator. I could see at a glance that quite a number of these officers were university men. By training they were professionals; by circumstance they were soldiers.

The commanding officer of 302 came in and walked up to the head table. Father Whitaker led me to him.

“Major, I want to introduce to you our new Chaplain. Father, meet Major Rosemere, our C. O.”



He hoped that I would like the place and the men; and I expressed my pleasure in being with them. His bearing and his decorations indicated he was a regular. A middle-size man, with an inclination toward a full waist. His clean-shaven face appeared rather young-looking for his years. He was quiet-mannered, and did not in the least convey the idea of being "hard-boiled."

"Major Martin." Clear eyes, a sharp face, sandy hair, and a close-cropped mustache.

"Captain Lynville." Also a regular. Big, bald, and burly; wide-faced and full-jawed.

"Captain Maloney. Take care of him, Father; he's the Wild Irishman of the outfit."

Everybody laughed, and the Captain smiled a big, Irish grin. He was tall and sturdy, athletically built; black-haired, gray at the temples; and eyes penetrating, and dancing with humor.

The introductions over, we sat down to a simple, though substantial, meal. Enlisted men were the waiters.

About fifty officers were present, and the conversation throughout the mess became very spirited, punctuated at times with salvos of laughter.

At one time I heard a sotto voce stage whisper somewhere in back of me: "Who's the big boy with the whiskers?"

"Sh! A chaplain!"

"Jewish?"

"No. Catholic."

“Ah, go on!”

I chuckled to myself. By evening my beard would be the talk of the camp! At any rate, I did not have to advertise; my Van Dyke was my best mark of identification!

In the afternoon Father Whitaker took me down to camp headquarters at the shops, to present me to Colonel Hegeman.

As we came to the crossroads, he pointed to a large house at the intersection and said: “This is Madame Rose’s place; the camp’s famous rum joint. One can get anything in there. Beer; “vinegar blink,” as the boys call the white wine, or vin blanc; vin rouge, red wine; cognac; brandy; rum; champagne.”

“I’m surprised the camp authorities let them operate so near.”

“What can they do? This is France, not the U. S. These people live here; it’s their home. No one can stop them, but we can put our men in the guardhouse, if they don’t toe the mark. Madame Rose is a widow, and she tries to keep things straight; she’s all right.”

A short distance below the main road, I noticed a barbed-wire inclosure.

“What’s that?”

“Four German prisoners’ stockades. We have about two thousand German prisoners here, used as laborers for repairing roads, loading and unloading cars, and similar work.”

Soon we were at Headquarters. Upon entering the door, I stopped in surprise. Here was a huge business

office with desks everywhere; stacks of orders and filing cabinets; typewriters clicking and telephones ringing; all the elaborate paraphernalia of a modern commercial enterprise. And yet, one could not mistake the nature of the place: everybody wore a military uniform, and doughty-looking soldiers pounded the keys.

Near the door was the Colonel's desk. He stood beside it, talking with an officer.

He was about forty-five or fifty, tall, mighty of frame and powerful of shoulder; big of bone and strong of muscle; standing firm and erect, every inch a soldier. He had a long strip of service ribbons across his left chest.

The most remarkable thing about him I found to be his face: broad and muscular, though not coarse in any sense. The eyes were sharp, with a hard glint in their dull fire. The jaw showed the caliber of the man: powerful, square, full, displaying bulldog tenacity and courage. A fighter through and through, a born leader of men; a he-man. He would never admit defeat. He would die fighting, but never say die. As he stood there, thumbs dug behind his belt and hands clenched in front, his whole body radiated power, held in leash by an iron will, but ready to burst restraint at a moment's notice. A big man for a big job. A square shooter.

And he had a heart, for he had humor. At this very moment his face broke into a smile, a network of wrinkles spread from the corners of his eyes, and he





Col. Harry A. Hegeman, left, and Lt. Col. James  
Florida, right



chuckled loudly in evident glee and amusement at something he related. The officer rocked back and forth in unforced laughter. So there was kindness beneath the somewhat severe appearance.

Father Whitaker and I walked up to the Colonel and saluted.

"Compliments, sir, from Major Stull, Senior Chaplain of Nevers. I wish to report for duty, sir."

Father Whitaker added: "Colonel, I've been transferred to the 19th Engineers. Father here has been appointed my successor."

Colonel Hegeman held out his right.

"I'm glad to know you, Chaplain. Hope you'll like our little place. Too bad Chaplain Whitaker must leave."

The Colonel asked us to be seated.

"Where were you stationed up to the present, Chaplain?"

"I arrived last night from G. H. Q. This is my first assignment."

"And where do you come from in the States?"

During our conversation the Colonel measured my personality. Finally he arose and said:

"I think we'll attach you to 302 for quarters and mess, the same as Chaplain Whitaker."

The interview with the Colonel over, we turned to the Adjutant's desk, and Father Whitaker introduced me to Major Ingram.

He was a very affable man with a ready smile, and we had an agreeable chat.



After leaving the Adjutant, Father Whitaker said to me:

"Here's a man I want you to meet."

A short distance away an officer noticed us coming and rose from his desk.

"Father, meet Lieutenant Colonel James Florida. The lads call him simply 'Jimmy.' "

He was a medium-size man, stockily built, with black hair, keen eyes, and a most engaging smile. A line ran down each cheek to the edge of his chin, as if the smile were a permanent mark of his personality. He was head of the Supplies Division in the shops. A big executive, with a big heart full of "the milk of human kindness." I immediately took a fancy to him.

We also met Major McGary, the Master Mechanic, and Major Ullmer, General Foreman.

We now took a stroll about the yards. What I saw here amazed me. Acres upon acres of supplies. Boxes of every imaginable form and size, all marked and assorted. Some were arranged together in huge squares; others rose up in tiers as big and as high as two- and three-story buildings. They contained motor parts of every description in numberless quantities.

And tires. Hundreds and hundreds of stacks, twenty and thirty tires placed one upon the other. All out in the open yard for lack of space, not to speak of those sheltered in the depot. Covered with canvas and tarpaulin to protect them from sun and rain. There seemed enough to supply an army.

This was the special domain of the 327th Base

Spare Parts Unit. It had charge of all spare parts for the various types of motor vehicles used in the army. Strictly speaking, it was not a repair outfit; however, since the Park here in its repair work made the greatest demand on spare parts, it formed a permanent and integral part of the organization.

We walked over to the salvage area. This would make a junk-dealer's paradise. A handsome fortune lay buried in all this thrown-out material. Discarded tires of trucks, cars, and motorcycles were piled hill high. The castaway motor parts ran into tens of thousands of tons. Ambulances, field kitchens, ammunition wagons, cars, and trucks, covered the area of entire city blocks, waiting to be overhauled, repaired, and reconstructed. The amount of labor involved in all this work assumed gigantic proportions, when one considered the condition in which these vehicles arrived at the Park.

Here came a trainload of wreckage, thirty, forty cars, awaiting removal. Entire flat cars were filled with a tangled mass of indeterminate machinery. Others contained two or three cars or trucks, smashed and twisted almost out of recognition, the result of direct hits by shell fire. Again others carried a single big truck, not noticeably damaged, and yet injured in some vital part of its mechanism.

A powerful crane swung its giant arm over the body of a monster Mack, gripped it front and rear, and pulled. The big truck was jammed in between two others. The crane creaked and groaned. A

scraping, screeching, snapping, bursting, ripping—the truck squirmed like a wounded thing—and then it swung clear and high in the air! Slowly the crane lowered it to the ground.

We passed through the Park and out onto the road. In the distance I heard a rumble as of far-away thunder. A cloud of gray dust floated in the air, drifting with the wind over the fields. The cloud approached, and the roar grew louder. A truck train was coming from the base ports, going up to the front. Eighty trucks, loaded high with army material, covered with olive-drab canvas. A caravan of war. The trucks thundered down the road into the camp, slowed down, and pulled up near the ditch. They stopped for gasoline, oil, and grease. While the train rested for the night, our men would make necessary emergency repairs, so that they could resume their journey in the early hours. The business of war must not be delayed.

Up the valley road, turning to the right at the cross-roads, we stopped near the big Y building. From here one could see little and hear nothing of the vast activity going on down in the valley.

I had seen enough to give me at least a faint idea of the magnitude and the importance of this Reconstruction Park, and I felt proud of the fact that I was to be its chaplain. Five thousand soldiers and two thousand German prisoners, together with a thousand soldiers of the 39th Engineers at Marcy, a few kilometers away—that was a beautiful field of labor. It would keep me busy without question.



Coming up to the road from the valley, I saw a long column of soldiers marching in formation. The fact struck me that I could see the gleam of the setting sun shooting off sudden darts of light from the shining blades of bayonets. The soldiers who carried these bayonets were not in the ranks, but marching at the side. These men were evidently under guard. I suddenly realized who they were: our friends, the enemy; the German prisoners, returning to their stockades after the day's work.

They came four abreast. The guards with rifle and bayonet walked alongside. Colored guards! American negro troops here in Verneuil—a distinct surprise for me! At the head of each section a white sergeant in belt and side arms set the pace.

The prisoners had a big white P W painted on the back and front of their coats: "Prisoner of War." They wore the regulation field-gray uniform of the German soldier, with trousers stuck into the shafts of their heavy army boots, and peakless fatigue caps. Every man of military age must have been drafted. I saw lads who could not be twenty years old; others close to forty-five; and the rest anywhere in between. But they were a sturdy-looking class of men, and they strode by with military precision. My eyes followed them as they marched a short distance, then bent off and disappeared in their inclosure.

Down this same road, from the direction of the Colonel's château, the M. T. R. P. military band now came toward us. The setting sun glimmered and glittered on their polished instruments. With an easy

stride they swung into the main entrance of the camp, stepped up to the flagpole, marked time, stopped.

Opposite to them the Sergeant of the Guard and two soldiers stationed themselves. A little distance away, to the left of the band, rigid as a statue, stood a solitary bugler.

A sharp blast of the bugle.

Up and down the road, in front of the tents upon the hillside, wherever I looked, hundreds of soldiers stopped in their tracks, and faced the fluttering flag. The Stars and Stripes shone in the golden glory of the evening sun, the emblem of freedom, protecting this bit of America upon a foreign soil.

A flash of light, as the bugle rose, and a wave of hands in salute.

And then, the bugle sang out its song—proud, spirited, triumphant, thrilling the multitude standing in silence like sculptured figures of stone. Slowly the flag was lowered, straining against the ropes, as if unwilling to leave the sunlight and the breeze. With a burst of melody that shattered the air, the band now played *The Star-Spangled Banner*—slow, powerful, majestic—the echoes rolling down the valley and away to the distant hills.

The flag was down.

Retreat!

And thus ended my first day as chaplain of 772.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE COMING OF THE REAPER

Next day Father Whitaker left. I now remained alone, thrown upon my own resources, bound to follow my own initiative. Military life was a sealed book to me, except for whatever information I had been able to pick up along the route over, and for the valuable instruction I had received from my predecessor.<sup>1</sup>

The sole chaplain in camp! Five thousand Americans, two thousand German prisoners, a thousand Engineers at Marcy—eight thousand souls looked to me for their spiritual guidance. There were whites and blacks, Americans and Germans, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and—Nothings. I could cross these divergent lines of race, color, and creed only with delicacy and tact, and set to work with a right good will.

The camp hospital would always receive my first and foremost care. Just now it demanded my immediate attention. I went on my first mission of mercy. The hospital consisted of plain army barracks. Each had two doors, one on either side. There were about two dozen beds in a ward. Metal beds, with springs,

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<sup>1</sup>Father, now Monsignor, Joseph Whitaker is at present Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.



mattresses, pillows, blankets. It surprised me to see that they had white sheets and slips. A wood stove occupied the center of the room between the two doors. The floor was nearly black in color, yet scrupulously clean, and showed signs of frequent and thorough mopping. A pungent odor of creosote penetrated the room; that, doubtlessly, was used as the disinfectant in swabbing and accounted for the color of the boards.

A Medical Corps captain was examining a patient, and judging from the way he manipulated his stethoscope, he seemed to be very serious about it. One of the ward men assisted him, for the camp had no female nurses. When the officer had finished with his patients, we introduced ourselves.

He was a tall, lanky man, about forty years of age, with a kindly eye and a pleasant face, named Charles Garth.

"How are the patients, Doctor, and how many have you?"

"In both wards—about forty all told. They are coming along all right, but I think we will have a great many more soon."

"You are a cheerful prophet! What makes you think so?"

"We heard from the base ports that there is a terrible epidemic among the troops coming over on the ships from the States. Of course, it may be only a rumor, but I believe we are beginning to meet the condition right here in camp. So far we have been singularly free from infectious diseases. Due to vac-

cinations and injections, the armies of this war know practically nothing of the old-time scourges, like typhus, cholera, smallpox, and so on. But here is something different. Men get what seems to be an ordinary case of grippe. Before they know it, they run into high fever, delirium, coma. Their condition is extremely toxic and, without warning, develops into a virulent and pernicious sort of pneumonia. They call it Spanish Flu."

"You have cases here in camp?"

"It seems so, and it apparently confirms the rumor. We have a few cases of pneumonia right now that developed in this fashion the past few days. I hope they are merely isolated instances. However, a week or two more will tell definitely. Here come my ward men with a patient. I suppose it's another case." He left me, to examine the lad.

I walked from bed to bed, from patient to patient, cheering some, chaffing others; to each and everyone I tried to say something encouraging. It took up the greater part of the morning.

As I was about to leave, the ward sergeant told me that a patient had died of pneumonia during the night. A German prisoner, seventeen years old, a Catholic; Father Whitaker had attended him. I arranged to have the funeral the next morning at nine.

I left the hospital. "Pneumonia." The word rang in my ears. Could this be the beginning of that dread epidemic regarding which rumors were afloat? The thought appalled me.

I went to see Captain Douglas of the "Peeweess." "Peeweess" was the nickname the camp gave the P. W. E.'s, the Prisoner of War Escort Company, upon whom rested the duty of guarding the German prisoners in their four stockades, of escorting them to and from work, and of seeing that none escaped while performing their labor duties at the shops and around the camp.

The captain had been notified by the hospital authorities of the death, and had sent a detail of German prisoners to dig the grave. Being Catholic, the lad would be buried in the parish cemetery at Verneuil. Nine o'clock next morning was satisfactory to him for the burial. He would send some prisoners along as pallbearers and to escort the body to the grave.

After dinner I went to see Major Gould, the Quartermaster, to send a coffin to the hospital, and asked him about the camp cemetery.

"Well, so far we have no cemetery of our own. The outfit stayed at Nevers for quite a time, and we had one there. So the few that have died out here were sent to Nevers for burial. We will select one for ourselves. Can you come along with me tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock to pick out a site?"

"At two? Yes, sir."

I went back to the hospital again, and found another lad had been brought in. The same story as in the morning. Perhaps Dr. Garth may be correct after all. I spoke to six or seven afflicted with pneu-



monia and who seemed somewhat critical. Their pulse was fast; their temperature, high; the breath, rapid and loud with rales. Some lay huddled up in their blankets, asleep or comatose. Two or three were wide awake and alert, their eyes wandering everywhere; for these I feared. Two, in particular, alarmed me.

Both being Catholic, I thought it best to prepare them for the Sacraments. So after supper I returned to the hospital, and sat down alongside the bed of G.

"How are you tonight, buddy?"

"All right, I think, Father."

"Any pains?"

"Yes, in my chest."

"I thought so."

"What is it, Father? Pneumonia?"

"The chart says so."

He closed his eyes for a little while, and I sat there quietly, waiting. Finally, he put out his hand from under the blankets, and he had a rosary wound around it. He took my hand in his and said, fixing his burning eyes upon my face:

"Father, tell me the truth: am I going to die?"

"Why, lad, I'm sure I don't know; I'm not the Doctor. I hope not. Put the thought out of your head, and fight your way back to health."

Again he closed his eyes, but for a longer space. When at last he opened them, he said, very gently:

"Father, hear my confession, will you?"

"Certainly."

He pulled himself over to the edge of his bed. I

placed my violet stole around my neck, and bent my ear to his lips. He whispered.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. . . ."

I then asked him whether it would not be best to receive Extreme Unction right now.

"Yes, please."

I opened my oilstocks and, with cotton brought by one of the wardmen, I began to anoint the lad. When I had finished, he leaned back contentedly in his pillows and smiled up at me.

"Now let come what comes! May I receive tomorrow morning, Father? I'd like to."

"Yes, indeed. I'll be here about seven."

I went to the bed of an Italian lad whom I considered critically ill. His breath came hard and short, and there was fear in his eyes.

"How are you tonight, J.?"

"I dunno, Fadder. I gotta sucha—sucha—pain in my—left side. Fadder—I no hafta die—do I, Fadder?"

"I don't think so, J. Keep up your fighting spirit!"

"But, Fadder—I'm—fraid! Oh, I no—wanna die! I gotta—live! I—always—been a gooda man.—I go to—churcho—and I go to—confesh—and I—"

"Fine, J. Now—"

"My modder—she live—and she—needa me. I no—wanna die, Fadder!"

Poor lad! He tossed about so much on his bed that he couldn't last, if he kept it up. I tried to calm him,

but he went on in his broken English like a little whirlwind, and I let him speak out his heart. Then, when he had done, I spoke to him quietly and told him to be an obedient patient—for his mother's sake.

"I'll be here tomorrow morning about seven and hear your confession and bring you Holy Communion. All right?"

"Yes, Fadder."

When I left J.'s bed the ward sergeant informed me that another lad wanted to see me.

"And you had better take a look at S. over there. He is a Catholic. He has a bad case of pneumonia and, being a booze-hoister, I don't think he will pull through."

Before I went to see S., I sat down beside the other lad. He had seen me anoint G. and hear his confession. Would I hear his confession, too?

"Certainly."

"But, Father, I'm not prepared. Will it be too late tomorrow?"

I told him that I would come at about seven in the morning for the other two lads and that I would hear his confession then and bring Holy Communion, also.

"That'll be fine, Father."

And now I went over to S. He was not in this afternoon; probably came in before supper. He was lying there, all curled up, his head dug into his pillow, apparently asleep. I looked at the ward sergeant standing at the foot of the bed.



"He's not really sleeping, I think, but somewhat comatose and semi-unconscious. Wake him up; it won't hurt him."

I called him. No answer. Then I shook him a little. He opened one eye and looked at me in a dazed fashion.

"Good evening, S."

" 'd evening."

"How are you feeling?"

"Aw right."

"Pretty sick, aren't you?"

"I—guess—so."

I felt I had to be a little more drastic here, or he might slip into complete unconsciousness; and then it would be difficult to do anything definite for him.

"Listen, S., you are a pretty sick lad; and, you know, one can never quite tell how things may turn out. I will bring Holy Communion to three of the lads here tomorrow morning. How about your going to confession and Communion, too?"

"Oh,—I'll wait, till—I'm over—this."

"That's all right. But you don't know whether you will get over it. So—how about it?"

"I'll wait—till I—get—over this!"

"You had better go. What's done is done. You'll feel better afterwards and you needn't worry about it later."

"I don't wanta."

"Sometimes things we don't want to do are good for us, and we ought to do them. This is one of those

things. Come, S., do this. I'll help you and make it easy for you. Be a good lad now and don't make any trouble. I'll ask the questions; all you have to do is answer them, and they'll only be a few! All right?"

"No!—I don't—wanta!"

"S., please!"

"Aw—go to hell and let me alone!"

"I won't go to hell for you; but I will let you alone. How about my saying a little prayer with you, as long as you don't want to go to confession?"

"Oh—aw right."

"Good. I'll say the prayer, and you just follow my words in your heart. Understand?"

"M-hm."

I knelt down and made an act of contrition for him—brief, but to the point; calm, but strong.

"Did you understand me and follow me just now, S.?"

"M-hm."

"Well, good-night."

"'d-night."

I rose, and sighed. I was very much worried. Did he have a real contrition? I did not know. But it seemed the best I could hope for just now. Perhaps some other time.

I stepped out and walked through the night. Darkness enveloped the camp, but above the stars were shining. My heart was filled with an odd mixture of emotions, both glad and sad. Life is such. So like this deep, dark night. But full of stars.

The sunrise next morning saw me on my way. The gold-gray effulgence of the dawn seeped slowly through the sky. The air was clear, crisp; and the tang of autumn floated lightly down the breeze. As I walked along the driveway leading from the road to the château, the high-arched trees formed a delicate lace-work of leaves against the pale blue of the heavens, and the dew dripped from the twigs in a gentle shower of jewels. A lovely morning.

I walked past the château to the count's chapel. It was locked, but a light shone in the caretaker's house nearby, so I stepped up to the door and rang the bell. A maid answered the summons.

"Mademoiselle, je suis l'aumônier catholique des soldats américains. Je desire, s'il vous plaît, le clef de la chapelle pour la celebration de la messe."

"Oui, monsieur."

I had rehearsed this little speech very carefully on the way over from the camp. How good or how bad my French sounded to the girl, I could not tell. However, she brought me the key of the chapel, so she must have understood.

The château chapel was a neat little structure, built entirely of smooth cut stone, Roman in style, not more than twenty feet in width, thirty in length, and twenty-five in height. There were two windows on each side, and a double window above the entrance. The roof formed a high gable, and a diminutive tower, with a solitary bell, straddled the top of it on a line with the façade.



As I entered, the weak light of the sunrise filtered dimly through the windows. I saw no pews, but there were, on each side, half a dozen kneeling and sitting benches, the latter without back rests. In front, near the wrought-iron sanctuary railing, stood a few chairs and prie-dieus, no doubt reserved for Count du Faye's family. A plain marble altar occupied the center of the apse. A beautiful stained-glass window, with a figure of the Madonna, burned and glowed in rich, bright colors behind the altar, lighting the morning gloom of the chapel like a vision from another world.

I lit the candles on the altar, vested, and began Mass. On this day, the fourth of October, we celebrated the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. His was a high-spirited soul, soldierly, military, knightly. He, too, had sallied forth, garbed in the accoutrements of war, fired with ambition and bent on victory. But the Lord had other designs with Francis. Slowly and gradually He drew him from the vanity of a worldly soldier career and made him a knight of the Cross. But his spirit never changed. The poverello always remained a troubadour and a knight, following his liege lord, Christ the King. His French strain would not be denied.

And here was I, a son of St. Francis, in the land of his mother, a soldier among soldiers, a modern Crusader with a cross on his shoulder, following the ancient Christian war-cry: "God wills it!" I asked the soldier saint to bless his soldier son.

At seven I was at the hospital. A little stand served

as my Communion table. I spread out a little linen cloth and placed the Precious Burden upon it. Then I turned to G. He looked at me, with eyes beaming and lips smiling; his hands were folded, clasping his rosary. Along the row of beds I saw many an inquisitive face turned in my direction.

*"Accipe, frater, Viaticum. . . ."*

A little Circle of White; two lips that met It; two eyes that closed; a soul communing with its God.

And then I heard the confessions of the other two and consecrated their lips with the Bread of Life.

*Pax et Bonum!*

After breakfast I returned again to the hospital to make my visit from bed to bed.

More pneumonia patients. I began to fear Captain Garth proved only too true a prophet. And yet I still hoped that he might be mistaken. It would be too terrible a thing to contemplate, if an epidemic swept over the camp. It could cripple the organization. Wholesale deaths in battle are to be expected; but one does not expect them back of the lines. And the minds of these men were not prepared to meet their Maker on such short notice. I went from one to the other, cheering, consoling, encouraging. I did everything I could for the lads.

I found J. as restless as yesterday; always moving about, twisting, jerking, talking; wasting his energy, fretting and fraying his resistance to pieces. It was his mentality, and one could not change it. However, it boded ill.

G. lay there quiet and calm. But he had not slept all night again. His eyes were blazing with an unnatural brightness. He seemed such a good lad, it really would be too bad if he went under. When I looked at him, he smiled.

"Say a little prayer once in a while, G. Not long ones, just short ones. Ejaculations—you know."

"I do, Father."

"Attaboy."

S. lay there as usual, all huddled up, head bent down to his chest, eyes closed, sleeping or unconscious. I watched him for awhile, and then passed on.

At nine o'clock we were ready for the funeral of our young German prisoner. About twenty Germans escorted the body, headed by the sergeant-major of the stockade to which the boy had belonged. Eight colored guards were standing near the prisoners, rifles grounded. A lieutenant commanded the detail.

We led the pallbearers over to the morgue tent. The coffin was lifted upon their shoulders, and carried to the waiting truck. The Germans fell into formation; the guards took their place behind the Germans; the lieutenant and myself followed the guards: and so we were ready to go.

Slowly our little burial party marched down the road, across the valley, up the hills on the other side, and through the town of Verneuil. When we reached the church, we turned into the parish cemetery, where an open grave yawned in one corner.

The pallbearers carried the coffin to the edge of



the grave. The German prisoners bared their heads, and I read the services of the Church, blessing the body and grave.

Gently kind hands lowered their comrade to his final resting place. I could not bring myself to let these enemy soldiers march back to camp without a word of consolation. The Church is the mother of all nations, and she loves her children with an equal love. So I spoke to these men in their mother tongue, praising the lad who had followed the call of his country in the days of his budding youth, who had died in a strange land and had to be buried in foreign soil, but whose soul we hoped rejoiced in the glories of God forever. Then I prayed the "Our Father" in German. Hardly had I finished, when the German sergeant-major approached me and snapped into attention, hand in salute, which I acknowledged.

"Herr Kaplan, may I address a few words to my comrades?"

"That, Sergeant, is a matter for the lieutenant to decide. Just a moment."

I told the lieutenant what the sergeant requested, and he said, "Oh—I think so. You can check up on what he says, Chaplain."

I interpreted the lieutenant's decision to the sergeant. He saluted, and turning to his comrades, he spoke to them for about three minutes. It was a soldier's tribute to a fellow soldier who had laid down his life in the cause of his country. When he had finished, the lieutenant came to me.

"Is that all, Chaplain?"

"Well, don't you give a volley over the grave, Lieutenant? I thought all soldiers are buried with military honors."

"Fact is, I don't know. This is the first German prisoner that I ever saw buried. Do they get a volley?"

"It is my first burial, too, so I don't know myself; but as long as we must decide right here, I would say this: if we do make a mistake, I would rather do it by giving them too much than too little. My impression is that even enemies receive a military burial."

"I think you're right. But we have no blank cartridges. These rifles are loaded for duty."

"Let them shoot into the heap of ground on the other side of the grave. There'll be no danger then."

I motioned the Germans back a short distance, out of the way of any ricocheting bullets.

The lieutenant ordered his colored guards in line, facing the grave. The Germans stood at salute.

"Get ready! Aim! Fire!"

Oh, what a ragged volley!

Another command.

Ragged again!

Another.

That was better.—

We marched back to camp.

In accordance with the appointment made, the Quartermaster, Major Gould, a French official, and myself, met at two o'clock, to choose a site for our camp cemetery.

In motorcycle sidecars we rode across the valley.

Why they should want the cemetery over a mile away from the camp, I could not divine. That, however, they were evidently doing.

Having arrived on the other side, we rode back and forth, and looked at different pieces of ground. A field situated on top of a hill overlooking the valley, directly in view of the shops and the camp, was finally selected, and the location of graves decided upon. The highest point alone was flat; the rest curved in a gentle slope. This, then, would be the final resting place for many of us. I looked over toward the camp and the hospital. How soon before some of my charges would leave it, only to be brought over here and lowered beneath the sod? Far away from family and home, mingling with the soil of a foreign land, like the little youthful prisoner this morning. Who knows, I too, perhaps.

And as I gazed over the field, the sod seemed to move, to rise, and to build itself into mounds, headed by rows on rows of little, plain, white, wooden crosses.

We returned, riding through the slanting rays of a golden autumn sun.

After supper I stopped in at the hospital again. My "booze-hoister," as the ward sergeant called him, worried me, and I hoped to find him in a more lucid mind.

But it was the same story—sleeping beautifully; to all appearances, though, he held his own. So I did not bother him.



A voice, faint and weak, called me from across the room.

My little Italian friend wanted me. He looked much thinner and much weaker. In short rasping breaths he told me of his pains and aches. The poor fellow was working himself to death.

"Listen, J. You must not talk so much. You must lie quietly and sleep. Close your eyes now and go to sleep!"

He closed his eyes. I stood there, watching that fever-wasted face. His eyes opened again.

"Fadder, I—"

"No, J. I'm not going to let you talk. Try and go to sleep, won't you?"

"Yes, Fadder."

Again he closed his eyes, and I blessed him and walked away. Noiselessly I stepped over to G.'s bed. Ah, asleep! Fine. But he did not sleep. As I stood there, he opened his eyes and smiled.

"No sleep, G.?"

He shook his head. "But I'm trying to."

"Keep on trying, my boy. You need sleep. I'll give you the blessing."

He crossed himself.

Saturday was another busy day, as my work kept me in the camp hospital nearly all morning. A few more near-pneumonia cases. Things seemed to be taking an alarming turn, and I commenced to believe in the Doctor's prophecy. I heard another lad's con-

fession. Some were improving, others were doubtful. J. was still fidgety; G. weakening; S. always sleeping or dozing.

During the night one soldier, Private T., had died of cerebral hemorrhage, not pneumonia; and he had never regained consciousness. Next day would be Sunday, and my whole morning would be taken up; so I set the hour for burial at half-past one in the afternoon.

After dinner I had to tramp from one end of the camp to the other, making arrangements for the burial next day. I called upon the Quartermaster to send a coffin to the camp hospital, and then climbed back up the hill to notify the Sergeant of the Guard, to send out a detail of guardhouse prisoners to dig a grave on our new cemetery. In order that the location be correct, we went over to the cemetery, and I pointed out the spot for the grave. From there I walked over to the Colonel's château to make arrangements with the camp band to be present and accompany the burial party. And with this the afternoon was gone.

As I entered my tent about seven o'clock that evening, a long queue of soldiers had formed up to the door of my tent—lads who wished to go to confession.

I lit my smoky barn lantern, sat at my table, and put on my stole. One by one they entered, knelt down beside me, confessed, and departed. I heard fifty confessions.

I felt very, very tired, as I arose and stepped out

of my tent to breathe the fresh air of the night. Light still burned feebly in the hospital wards, so I went to take a last look at my lads before retiring.

S. was sleeping as usual, muttering loudly to himself. Delirious, no doubt.

I stepped over to J.'s bed. Empty! The ward sergeant stood nearby. I looked at him in surprise. He nodded.

"Passed out. Had a sudden sinking spell and never rallied. Died about six."

Poor J. He did not want to die. But the Lord had decided otherwise. I thought of his mother who needed him and a feeling of sadness crept over me.

I looked anxiously over to G.'s bed. He was still there. The sergeant had followed my glance, and as I looked at the sergeant, he shook his head slowly and mournfully. I walked to G.'s side. His eyes were closed, but his lips were whispering something. I bent down to catch the words.

"My Jesus, mercy!"

A lump rose up in my throat, and a mist clouded my eyes. He could not sleep; but he could pray.

I tiptoed out of the ward. I had heard the flap of the wings of the Angel of Death. It was the coming of the Reaper.



## CHAPTER VII

### MY FIRST SUNDAY

The far horizon was aglow with the dawn.

The sun came creeping slowly up the world, and from behind the low-humped hills shafts of scintillating glory speared the fleeing night, while the hidden sun painted an aureole of gold across the opal-colored face of the East. The morning air, cool and delightfully refreshing, invited to a stroll along the countryside amid the glamor of the sunrise. But duty called me elsewhere.

Soon after six I walked the short distance from my tent over to the Y building, a large structure made of unpainted lumber, which could seat, I think, over two thousand. It served as the camp theater, with stage, orchestra pit, benches, and all; it was primitive in structure, but admirably suited for large assemblies of men.

As I entered, several hundred soldiers were already present, waiting for Mass to begin. Guthrie, my faithful mass server, espied me, took my kit and brought it up on the stage. The front curtain had been raised and a drop curtain lowered. Before this curtain stood a table, neatly covered with a white cloth, which served as the altar. I opened my kit and arranged the

vestments and the chalice; Guthrie arranged the other articles. This kit, the most valuable part of a Catholic chaplain's equipment, had been supplied to me by the Chaplains' Aid Association of New York. Small and compact, weighing altogether not more than twenty pounds, it contained everything necessary for Mass, from chasuble to chalice, from candles to cruets. In a few minutes the altar stood ready.

Some men asked me to hear their confessions. We stepped behind the curtain onto the back stage. To my surprise I saw a dozen soldiers, rolled up in their blankets, sleeping on the floor. They were truck-train men, passing through from the base to the advance zone, who had sought shelter and sleep here for the night. This being no convenient place for confessions, I went into a side room. Here, too, a soldier lay sleeping, but he was snoring mildly; so I felt we would be safe enough from his inquisitive ears. One by one they came in, knelt at my knee, and confessed. It made no difference to these lads that I could see their faces. They were glad to have a priest, to whom they could unburden their soul. The exigencies of the time of war had taught them the value of the consolation of their faith. How glad I felt that I could bring them peace and benediction! And so, with a sleeping soldier at my feet, I heard their confessions.

Then I began Mass. Perfect quiet reigned in the hall, except for the faint rustle of a rosary here and there and an occasional cough.

After the Gospel I turned to my audience. It was

my first appearance before my congregation. As I spoke at the edge of the stage and saw these hundreds of eager faces gazing up at me, a peculiar sensation gripped my heart. When I came overseas, my sole thought had been to go to the front, to help the wounded and dying fighters in the lines. I never thought of areas in the rear; and only with reluctance had I obeyed orders to come here. But now my heart went out to these men. They were *my* boys; they looked up to me as to their father, and placed their souls into my hands. It edified me to see so many at this early morning hour, assembled in this dimly lit building to hear Mass. Fear did not urge them to come. Neither the fear of sudden death nor the fear of reproach from the folks; they were far from the lines and far from home. They gathered here of their own accord, from a sense of plain duty, out of love for their faith. And I felt proud of them, and happy to be their chaplain. With this feeling uppermost in my soul, I addressed warm words of greeting to the soldiers.

While speaking, one of the soldiers sleeping behind the curtain must have awakened on hearing my voice, and spoke rather loudly. Guthrie vanished.

"Hey, you fellows, shut up! We have Mass out there!" He slipped back to his place, solemn and serene. I had to smile.

The Mass proceeded. At Communion I heard reverent steps coming near from all sides, marching up to the stage through a little side door. In groups of



eight they filed out from the left wing, knelt before the altar, received, and disappeared to the right.

Their devoutness touched me, and the circumstances of time and place made it all the more impressive. We were not in a church or minster, brightly illuminated and appropriately decorated, with statues, shrines, and altars, the organ playing a soul-inspiring hymn. A theater for a church; a stage for a sanctuary; a table for an altar. And still, here the same mysteries were being celebrated as in the grandest dome amid the most imposing pomp; here the same Master came into the hearts of these lads and in the same manner as He did to the Twelve at the Last Supper; and here the same angels adored unseen as they did at the world-sanctifying drama of the Cenacle. And I know an angel walked near each one of these boys going slowly back to his place, hands folded and heart in prayer.

Soon Mass ended, and a babble of voices arose, as all hurried off to breakfast. Not one tarried; for any man who missed a meal in the Army, never managed to retrieve his loss!

After awhile I strolled to the hospital. I found G. still alive, but not far from death. His face was very peaky and pale; his hair wet with perspiration; his lower jaw sagging; and his eyes were stary. Except for a miracle, I did not see how he could last much longer. Bending over him, I spoke some ejaculations into his ear and blessed him for the last struggle. It seemed to me that his eyelids twitched; perhaps he

understood. My heart hurt to see so brave a lad slowly slipping away.

S., still delirious, mumbled and muttered to himself. His chart, however, showed him not really losing ground, although he had been critically ill for several days. Would this "booze-hoister" of mine become conscious enough to straighten out his soul? I had to keep on hoping.

The number of flu and pneumonia patients had again increased. I saw new faces in the wards; so I spoke to these specially. A few of the older cases were improving; others were taking a bad turn. Thus A., the brother of one of our lieutenants, was waging a losing fight. His resistance began to break under the constant pressure of this insidious fever. Though not a Catholic, he always showed himself willing that I should pray with him.

And so I made my morning visit with the sick.

At nine o'clock there would be field Mass at the German prisoners' stockades. I walked down. Meanwhile the morning's promise of a beautiful autumn day fulfilled itself. The sun rode resplendent in the sky, and the withering leaves on the trees and bushes had blossomed into rainbows. Up and down the roadways, color was splashed in a most lavish fashion. Green and gold. Red and saffron. Purple and brown. A riot of tints and shades. Like liquid paints the colors fused and melted and ran down the hillsides into the lowlands, blending their beauty into a vivid

harmonious picture that stood out in startling contrast to the clear deep blue of the sky. Autumn had indeed fared forth, arrayed in all her glory.

Such a picturesque setting had Nature provided for our field Mass at the stockades down in the valley. The four stockades were located in a row, each one a large quadrangle. Two barbed-wire fences, about eight feet high and ten feet apart, formed the boundary lines of each stockade. Inside this double fence sentries walked post day and night, guarding the prisoners. The space between the second and third stockades extended to a width of perhaps one hundred and fifty feet. Here I intended to say my field Mass.

The Catholic prisoners from Stockades 1 and 4 at the extreme ends, were marched under guard into this open space and lined up along the fences to the right and left. Those of Stockades 2 and 3 stayed within their own inclosures, moving up to the double fence facing this open space. In this manner all could see the altar, placed in the middle of this area between the second and third stockades. The American soldiers were immediately in back of me, as I faced the altar. I thus had the German prisoners to my right and left, and my own men to my rear. A few hundred soldiers were present, many from the neighboring Engineers' camp at Marcy.

Guthrie fetched a table from one of the "Peewee" barracks, spread a white cloth over it, and made an improvised altar, arranging the articles upon it, while I vested. A breeze was blowing, and the candles



would not stay lighted, so two of my men stood behind the altar at the two corners with their backs to the breeze, and held a lighted candle in their cupped hands throughout the services. Ten years later Pat Barnes, now a famous radio announcer, told me that he was one of the two human candelabra on that memorable Sunday morning.

And so, beneath the great blue dome of the sky, with the flaming sun for a sanctuary lamp, amid the colorful tapestries of Autumn's beauty, surrounded by friends and foes, I began my first field Mass. No one moved, except the sentries on both sides, who walked their post, rifles on their shoulders and bayonets gleaming in the sun. There was solemnity in all the simplicity.

It being the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, I read the Gospel of the day to the assembled soldiers. I spoke on the ruler in the Gospel, whose son had been cured by the Lord, and who then believed with his whole house. The belief of this ruler is the same as ours. The sun shining so brightly above our heads this morning is the same sun that shone upon this ruler, that beamed upon the martyrs in the amphitheater of Rome, that lighted the way of the missionaries through the centuries, that sheds its beauty upon the folks in our homeland and upon us here in France. Our faith is like this sun, the same at all times and in all places, giving light and warmth and beauty and glory to all nations and to each of us.

Then I gave a short sermon to the Germans in their own language. They were on both sides of me, and this obliged me to turn continually from one side to the other. Being in the open air, quite a serious acoustic problem confronted me, trying to make myself understood in opposite directions.

The sermon over, I turned again to the altar and paused for a moment to recover from the exertion. Somewhere nearby a bird was singing out its heart in a piercing melody of jubilant happiness. The peace of God lay like a benediction upon the sunny fields, and the war seemed a million miles away.

I continued with my Mass. A number of soldiers, some of them engineers, went to Holy Communion. These men were forfeiting their Sunday-morning breakfast. It afforded a deep consolation to know that the violent and almost deadly twist, which the war had given to the lives of men over here in a distant land, had not effected any lasting change in their souls. They remained pretty much what they had been at home.

After Mass I went to my tent for a short thanksgiving and from there to the mess hall. I could hardly expect a breakfast anymore, the time for that being long past due. John Gallenstein, the chief cook of our mess, scurried about in his preparation of the noon-day meal, perspiring and very busy. But I smiled my sweetest smile upon John, and John promptly succumbed, giving me an excellent breakfast.

My morning's work, however, was not yet ended. The schedule called for general camp service at ten thirty, and I had no time to lose. When I arrived at the Y building, about seven or eight hundred men had assembled.

A Y.M.C.A. secretary led the singing of a hymn, accompanying it on a piano from the stage. I then made an impromptu invocation, read the Gospel of the Sunday, and gave the men a fifteen-minute sermon on some Christian virtue. The whole assembly then sang "Lead, Kindly Light," that soul-searching song of Newman from his pre-Catholic days, when the night of doubt and anxiety had settled upon his truth-seeking mind. I closed the service with a military blessing, requesting the grace of God upon the President, upon Congress, the people at home, the Commanders of the Army and Navy, the officers, the men, the fighters at the front, the camp, the living and the dead. That finished my morning's work.

The funeral of Private T. I had set for one thirty. When I arrived at the hospital, quite a large number of soldiers had assembled. The firing squad and the band were ready. I walked up to a group standing near the truck, who were to be the pallbearers, and together we went to the morgue tent. The coffin lay on the ground, with the cover not as yet fastened down, so I looked in; empty. Soon two wardmen came, entered the tent, came out with a stretcher, and



set it next to the coffin. The body was covered with a blanket, which they removed.

I glanced at the body in astonishment: it wore no uniform! Did they intend to clothe it out here? Or, worse yet, did they mean to bury him this way, without uniform?

They lifted the body and put it into the coffin. I spoke up.

"Wait a moment, boys. You're not going to bury this man without his uniform, are you?"

They looked at me in surprise, and one of them said, "Why—yes, sir. That's the way they're all buried. I think it's the English custom."

"Well, we're not English, but Americans. See if you can get a uniform for him."

They left, and I placed the lid upon the coffin. As we waited, I glanced at the men standing about. They looked at each other, and there was a scowl on their faces. One blurted out:

"Here we come to this God-forsaken country, to help win the war; and when we die, they bury us like dogs!"

Finally the two wardmen returned with the information that his clothes had been turned in, and there were no others around.

What could I do? This being my first funeral of an American soldier, I did not know the regulation on the point. It had always been my impression that a soldier was buried in uniform, but I could not very

well act on mere impression. And now, everything was set for the funeral, and I had to proceed.

"Very well, close the coffin. I must bury him this way then, although I hate to do it. Now listen: J. is going to be buried tomorrow and you see to it that there is a uniform ready for him, because I am going to see the Colonel the first thing in the morning to have this changed. If I have to fight for this, then I'll fight! Go ahead."

They tightened the lid.

The pallbearers carried the coffin to the waiting truck. Having placed it in position and draped it with the colors, they stood alongside, three right and three left. The band took the lead, the firing squad followed, and I was next, about five paces behind the squad. Then came the truck with the body, and a double line of soldiers made up the rear.

Slowly the flag of the camp slipped down its staff and fluttered at half-mast. The band leader gave the signal. Dull and somber the muffled drums beat out the march of death.

The procession went down the hill and turned into the road. As we passed the camp flag, the band played Chopin's funeral march. The dirge wept and moaned out over the valley; and the hills, as if in sympathetic agony, sent back the wailing echoes in a doleful ululation.

Arriving at the crossroads, the procession swung to the left and marched down the hill into the valley below. Many soldiers were on the road; and as we

passed, they stood at the side in salute or with their caps held in their right hand over their hearts—their final tribute to a comrade traveling the way of his last journey.

Solemnly the funeral cortege moved along. All one could hear was the sound of feet grinding the gravel of the road and the monotonous roll of the groaning drums. We crossed the river and the canal, and bent off to the right up the hill, reaching the cemetery. All marched to the grave, where the coffin was deposited on two boards placed across the grave.

I stood at the foot of the body, the firing squad and the band to the right, and the friends and comrades to the front and left.

In simple words I told them of Private T., of his illness and his death. He would be the first to be buried in this cemetery. He had left the home of a fond mother, tore himself away from her tender embrace, to join the colors and to serve his country in the hour of her need. Far away from all he loved and all who loved him, he had given unstintingly of his energy and life, that his country might win. He served his country in the capacity in which he could do most good for the common cause. He was as much a soldier as those who stood on the firing line, facing the shot and shell of battle, and he died in the line of duty as well as they. More than he no one could give, for he gave his life and made the supreme sacrifice. Rest to his soul! May the Lord of Battles look down with mercy and kindness upon him, and take him into His



father-arms and hold him close to His father-heart! May the Great Consoler comfort his mother far away across the ocean, because her boy will never come home again to soothe the pain of parting! And may we all learn to live in such a way, that the God of Hosts and the Judge of the living and the dead may find us ready when He issues His call and summons us to report to the Eternal Commander-in-Chief of heaven and earth!

I said a prayer in English, taken from the ritual; and the Miserere, this cry of the soul of David to God, as old and as new as human sin and forgiveness divine.

Four soldiers lowered the body into the grave, and the band played "Nearer my God to Thee"—solemn, plaintive, pleading. Like a prayer from the depths of a heart wrung in agony, the music floated over the hill and up to the heavens above.

Now the volley. Three sharp, crashing cracks that shattered the air and rattled among the hills in never-ending echoes. Then a bugler stepped up to the edge of the grave and blew taps. Soft and sweet and tender the pulsing notes sobbed over the open grave and seemed to linger lovingly where the body of a comrade lay asleep in death. "Farewell—Adieu!"

At that moment a cloud passed the face of the sun and threw a shadow across the grave.

And thus I buried my first American soldier, in a field of France.

I rode back to camp in the truck. A baseball game was in progress on a large field near the last of the prison stockades, and I went over to witness it. Practically the whole camp had congregated there, officers and men, forming a huge circle around the playing field. A large number of German prisoners were lined up along their barbed-wire inclosure, manifestly interested in this typically American sport. They were quite a distance away from the diamond, but they could plainly see the game. They may not have understood anything about the fine points of the game, but the spectacular side of it and the sheer skill of the ball players must have been perfectly obvious even to the most obtuse.

Our men enjoyed themselves immensely. Facilities for active participation in sports were rare in France, due to the lack of time, space, and equipment. So, when an opportunity presented itself to see a good game, like today, it keyed them up to a high pitch of excitement, and they followed the plays with a keenness of appreciation far greater than the fans at home could ever hope to have while watching their home team play in their own park.

Our team played the Triple A's, who, I was told, came from somewhere near Paris. The men did not care who they were as long as they played a good game of ball. And a good game it certainly was, with the score very low, keeping everybody on edge most of the time.

Naturally, as in every ball game, a running fire of good-natured razzing kept on issuing from the side lines. The poor umpires, as usual, had to stand the brunt of most of the jibes and taunts. Their judgment, of course, on balls and strikes, outs and safes, never tallied with the facts, and their decision on close plays invariably deviated miles from the true state of affairs. That is, if one listened to the spectators. The remarks bandied about the place were illuminating and amusing.

"All right now, give him the dark one! He won't see it."

"Wow! He missed it by a mile!"

"Bean the big bruiser! We'll loan him a stretcher!"

"Attaboy! Another! Two strikes!"

"Aw, Ump! Have a heart! A ball?"

"Don't look at the plate with your crockery eye, Ump! Use your good one!"

"Now, Ump, call this next one a strike, and we'll give you an extra share of cornwilly!"

"Ball again? Why, it cut the heart right out of the plate and carried it into the catcher's mitt!"

"Robber! Burglar! Call an M.P.!"

"Three strikes! Hoorah! You're all right, Ump! You can see straight, if you want to. I'll treat you afterwards to a glass of vinegar blink!"

And so it went on. A good play they cheered to the echo; a bad play they met with groans. One would almost think the issue of the war depended upon the outcome of the game. Everybody felt contented and,



for the time being, forgot about the strain of war and war work.

We won the game, 5 to 1, but I did not see the finish of it. I stayed for about two innings and left. Up on the hill another game was being played in the hospital, the game of life and death. I felt uneasy about some of my patients, and thought it best to see them; a thing more important than watching a ball game.

As I entered the hospital, I cast a quick glance over to G.'s bed. The ward sergeant was feeling his pulse, and as I came to the bed, the sergeant looked up.

"Father, he's 'going West.' It is only a question of minutes now."

And so it was. The lad's eyes were glassy, and his breath came in short spasms, far apart. I bent over and spoke sharply into his ear, ejaculations and a brief act of contrition. Then I gave him absolution. Death hovered near. As I sat there, watching his thin faded face, a deep sorrow came over me. I liked this boy; he had been such a sturdy, manly little fellow. Never a whine, never a whimper; always smiling, even when he felt he would not live. To smile like that is indeed a gift of God. But the smile no longer lit up his face; the agony of death wrote pain in its place. The sharp gasps of his breathing rattled with heavy rales.

He would smile no more. How he had smiled and how his eyes had gleamed, when he told me the first day that he expected a sergeancy soon, having been

recommended for it by his officer! He had been so genuinely happy in the thought of his promotion. Those chevrons would never decorate his sleeve.

A good soldier, he had given his best; none at the front could have given more. And he had been so brave in his last fight; game to the end. With a prayer on his boyish lips he looked Death in the eye and courageously went forth to meet his Creator.

The battle was well-nigh over. Physically the loser, spiritually the winner, he had fought the good fight, and I knew that Prince Michael, the valiant Commander of God's Army, must be standing somewhere near, ready to welcome this brave little comrade-in-arms and lead him up to the throne of the Great King to receive the accolade of glory.

Now his lips quivered; a hissing intake of air; a few quick gasps; a twitch of pain. And G.'s soul had passed beyond. Dead. The ward sergeant gently dropped his wrist and walked sadly away. I closed my eyes, and slowly my head sank into my hand. "*Requiem aeternam. . . .*"

I arose, and gave a last look at him. His hand extended over the side of the bed, and from his wrist there dangled his rosary. And from it, motionless, hung a cross. Silently, with heavy heart, I left the ward and stepped outside.

The sun was sinking in the west.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FOLLOWING THE FURROWS

Service is the keynote of a chaplain's duties. Nothing that is human or spiritual may be foreign to the charity of this camp Samaritan. Taking care of the sick and the dead forms one of the main general duties of a chaplain. Almost immediately upon my arrival at the M. T. Reconstruction Park I met with a problem that demanded a solution without delay. I could not forget my first American funeral, when I was compelled to bury the soldier without uniform. It produced in me the firm determination that this should never happen again.

A double funeral, that of J. and G., would take place the next day. So, early in the morning following G.'s death, I went to see Colonel Hegeman. I stepped up to his desk and saluted. He looked up.

"What is it, Chaplain?"

"Colonel, I have a matter of general importance to the camp upon which I respectfully request your decision."

"Have a chair, Chaplain, and tell me about it."

"Yesterday afternoon, sir, I had my first American funeral, Private T. It rather shocked me to see that they placed his body in his coffin practically nude. I



spoke to the wardmen of the hospital about getting his uniform; but they found that his clothes had already been turned in, with no others on hand at the time. Besides, they gave me to understand, that this was the customary way in which they sent soldiers' bodies to Nevers for burial. I didn't know the army regulation on this point; and then, too, everybody and everything was ready for the funeral. I had no choice, therefore, in the matter, but to proceed according to schedule and bury the man that way. Some soldiers saw T. being placed in the coffin, and I could see from their attitude that they considered the thing an insult toward the dead. I'm afraid there will be some talk about this in the camp.

"So, if I may, Colonel, I respectfully request you to decide that deceased soldiers be buried in uniform. I think it would be good for the morale of the camp."

A hard glint came into the Colonel's eyes while I spoke. He called the adjutant.

"Major, instruct the hospital authorities at once that all dead soldiers are henceforth to be buried in full uniform. The Quartermaster will issue uniforms, if necessary. Notify the Quartermaster also to this effect."

Turning to me, he said, "All right, Chaplain, it will be taken care of."

"Thank you, Colonel."

Relieved and happy, I went to the hospital. Meeting the ward sergeant, I told him of the Colonel's decision.

"Yes, I know about it, Chaplain. Headquarters phoned up a short while ago. When is the funeral?"

"At ten."

"We'll have everything ready for you by that time."

"Fine."

I walked around to see my patients and gave the last rites to one lad who seemed very low. Lieutenant J.'s brother was sinking rapidly. Some new cases of flu had entered the hospital that morning. As I came to one patient's bed, a broad smile spread over his face.

"What's the good news, buddy, that makes you feel so happy?"

"Father, S. is talking in his delirium. Listen to him."

I listened.

"One beer, bartender!" And after a moment's pause: "Hey, bartender, set up two of 'em!"

I could not help smiling, too. Even in his delirium my "booze-hoister" could not forget his "stuff." But though I smiled, my heart went sad; for he still had not made his peace with God, and I felt by no means certain that he would recover. What, if not?

I passed on to the others, giving whatever cheer I could.

The time for the funeral approached, and I went to the morgue tent to see if everything was in order. There lay both J. and G. in their coffins, dressed in clean uniforms, peaceful in their last sleep. Their faces had the silent calm of death, as if there never had been

a final struggle for the mastery of their souls. A deep sense of peace came over me, too, at the thought that I had helped them both to fight their last fight to victory.

Soon the funeral procession formed, the flag dipped, the drums rolled, and we were on our way. The day was dreary. Leaden clouds were lashed along by a brisk wind, and gusts of misty drizzle swept across our path, as we solemnly marched to the graves.

Only one was finished! The other had been dug to the depth of not even two feet! I motioned to the corporal in charge of the guardhouse prisoners who formed the grave detail.

"Why isn't the second grave finished, Corporal? I told your sergeant that two men would be buried at the same time."

"He didn't tell me that, sir. We came out yesterday afternoon to dig this one and were here early today to finish it. Seeing we had some time left before the funeral, I told the men to start another. Had I known it, I would have taken a double detail along."

What should I do; take one body back and bury it later? I looked over to the road. The truck had returned to the camp, so I thought it best to proceed.

"We'll talk it over after the services, Corporal."

"Yes, sir."

He moved over to his men. I blessed the bodies and read the burial service of the Church; then gave an address, touching briefly on their life in the army,



their illness, and the pathetic incidents of their death. The body of G. we then lowered into his grave, and it was almost with a pang that I felt constrained to leave J. outside the grave, without being able to bury the two together.

The band played "Nearer my God to Thee"; the volley thundered; taps; and all left but the burial detail.

The corporal looked uneasy as he approached me.

"What'll we do, sir?"

"What *can* we do? And here's another thing, Corporal. These graves are supposed to go in series, each one to the right of the next. Don't you see that your arrangement is all wrong? Here is Private T., buried yesterday. These two new graves are one on each side of T., the one to the right and the other to the left. The first two will be in a wrong position. The graves will now run this way—two, one, three, four, five; instead of one, two, three, four, five."

"I never thought of that. It's an ugly mistake, sir. I'm sorry."

"Well, the mistake is made, and we can't change it; we must go on. We can't take the body back to camp. A soldier in his coffin is not like a box of merchandise, to be handled and dragged around unnecessarily. Let your men finish this grave. I'll wait here."

Little did I know how long it would take to bury J. that day. Had I known, I would probably have made my decision differently. Only one man could dig at a time in the restricted space. The subsoil con-

sisted of clayey ground, hard, compact, resistant, and the drizzle, turned almost into rain, made the ground slippery and sticky. A shovel could neither penetrate nor loosen it; it needed a pick, and a pick was difficult to handle in an area seven by three. Instead of breaking the ground, the pick more often simply slipped back and out. It meant slow and laborious toil. By eleven thirty so little progress had been made, that I realized it would be mid-afternoon before I could think of the burial; so I walked back to the camp for dinner.

About three o'clock I rode in a motorcycle sidecar out to the cemetery. The grave had now been dug about four feet deep. The air, still misty and muggy, burst every now and then into nasty little squalls that sent drops of rain on top of J.'s coffin, beating a doleful tattoo upon the boards. Poor J.! He did not want to die; and now it seemed he did not want to be buried. And G. already lay in his little chamber of death, close to the heart of mother earth, sleeping the sleep that will never be broken until the loud blast of Gabriel's trumpet shatters the tombs on the day of great wrath! The war and the world meant nothing to these two now, and neither did the rain.

"How long do you think it will take, Corporal?"

"Till after supper, I'm sure. But we'll stick, if it takes all night."

I rode back to the hospital; a few patients were near passing, and these I had to see.

After supper I walked through the dark and rain to the cemetery. A feeble light shone on the field and

guided my mud-weighted feet to the grave; the soldiers had propped up a lantern in one corner of the grave, and it threw a ghastly glow upon their tired, rain-soaked figures. They seemed unreal, unearthly, ghoulish, in this fantastic mixture of light and shadow.

The corporal stepped over to me. "Sir, I did something that I think you should know about."

"What is it?"

"We needed a light to work, and the men wanted drinking water. What should I do? A guard is not allowed to leave camp prisoners out of his sight; so I couldn't go and leave them here. For the same reason I couldn't send any of them without going along. We might all have gone, but I didn't want to leave the body alone. There was no one else to send, so I broke the army regulations by putting one of the prisoners on his word of honor not to attempt to escape, and sent him back to camp for a lantern and water. That can put me into the guardhouse, sir, if it's found out."

"Oh, I think you did the right thing, Corporal. It was an emergency; and since he came back, don't worry."

"Thanks, sir."

"Did you people have anything to eat for supper?"

"No, sir, nothing since breakfast."

"That's too bad. Why didn't you call my attention to it this afternoon? I could have arranged for a different detail to come out here."

"I didn't think of it then, Chaplain. C'est la guerre."

I regretted it, but regrets would not alter matters



any, and so the work went on. It seemed the grave would never be finished. The drizzling rain kept sweeping along, causing a cold, clammy feeling of discomfort. The men were plastered from head to foot with yellowish clay.

At last they had the grave dug. By the murky light of a wet and smoked lantern we laid the body of J. to rest, amid the patter of rain, beneath the pall of night. The scene impressed me as pitifully tragic. After a final prayer, we filled the grave and departed. It was after ten o'clock.

That night another soldier died, and late in the afternoon A., Lieutenant J.'s brother, passed away. Again it meant preparations for funerals. But this time I saw to it that no mistake was made in the position of the graves.

Graves one and two, of course, always remained transposed in order. I took painstaking care that their crosses marked the right bodies, so as not to cause any confusion. I never felt any worries on this score, however, for each body has its own individual identification mark.

When a soldier enters the service, he receives two aluminum discs about the size of a twenty-five-cent piece, into which his name and army serial number are punched. These are his identification tags, and he must wear them around his neck on a piece of strong tape. No two soldiers have the same serial numbers. There may be a thousand John Smiths in the

army, but no two have the same numbers; thus the name and number form a means of perfect identification. The Central Records Office, furthermore, has a complete personal history of each individual on file, including age, home, parents, nearest relatives, organization, and so forth.

When a soldier dies, one of his tags is attached to his grave marker or cross, and the other is left on his body in the grave. Thus each body could be identified, even if the grave marker or cross should be removed or interchanged. It is the chaplain's duty to see that no body is buried without its tag. Besides this, the chaplain must make out a triplicate report or certificate, giving the man's name, serial number, date of burial, location and number of grave, cause of death, and the name of nearest relative. One copy goes to organization headquarters; one is sent to the Central Records Office to complete the soldier's personal record; and the third is transmitted to the Graves' Registration Service, which has charge of cemeteries and graves. All graves are numbered, and each cemetery has an official number; ours was 552. In this way the Army is able to locate every grave and identify each body, if the body can be identified before burial. Furthermore, if the chaplain knows the address of the nearest relative of a deceased soldier, he should write a personal letter to the relative, containing whatever information he can supply.

I always found these personal letters very difficult to write. They meant the infliction of very severe

suffering upon loving hearts that were looking forward with fondest hope to the happy return of one they loved most dearly and who would now never come back to their welcoming embrace. Sometimes I would receive letters in return, pathetic with the pain of aching hearts, thanking me for the services rendered and asking the blessings of God upon me for having assisted their boy in his last days and hours. The consoling details I could write to them often helped to soothe their pain and lessen the grief they felt at his premature death.

But I could not do this in every case. An instance: One lad met with an accident, and he died on the spot. I notified his mother of the sad occurrence. She wrote back to the effect that her boy had always been such a good lad, clean-living, faithful at all times in the discharge of his religious duties; surely I could soften her great sorrow by telling her that I had been with him in his last moments and that he had died fortified with the rites of the Church. But the facts about him were such that I did not have the heart to disillusion this good mother about the character of her son while over in France. In the meantime she must have received my letter of notification; so I left her letter unanswered. It was an act of mercy not to let her know.

Many were the letters of condolence I had to write in these days of the flu. Nearly every day for a period of three or four weeks, the Grim Reaper stalked through the hospital wards and claimed his victims.



Fortunately, the epidemic was not as severe as expected. We lost hardly more than two dozen out of a total of nearly seven thousand in the month when the flu reached its height. Altogether, from October to the end of May, we lost one officer and thirty-two men, among whom eight were German prisoners. This number of dead is, I feel sure, comparatively small; particularly, since the number of patients in our camp hospital through the winter sometimes ran as high as one hundred to one hundred and fifty at a time. It had been my privilege to bury most of these men, Catholics and Protestants.

On October 26, Chaplain Wood, an Episcopalian, became assigned to the Reconstruction Park. We divided the work in suchwise that he took charge of all non-Catholics, while I retained the care of the Catholics and the German prisoners. This relieved me of much responsibility, but it did not perceptibly lessen my work in the hospital; I still continued to visit each lad who fell sick. Nor did it lessen my worries. There would always be one or the other patient unconscious or delirious, like S., whom I had not been able to prepare properly for the eventuality of death. Besides the usual visits during the day I would slip into the hospital early in the morning and late at night, making at times as many as half a dozen calls in the course of a day's work, hoping to find them fully conscious.

S. had me worried for three weeks. Every time I came to his bed, I would find him "sleeping the clock

around." But, contrary to all expectations he recovered. Coming to the hospital one morning, I found him sitting up in bed, wide awake, newspapers littered about him; he was reading the comic sheet. He improved rapidly, developing a ravenous appetite, and after about a week was allowed out of bed. A few days later he was given his uniform, and that same day, after dinner, S. disappeared without notice to the wardmen and without permission.

The wardmen were frantic, and no one knew where he had gone. They looked in the other wards. Not there. They ran to his barracks. Not there either. Someone suggested looking in the hospital mess kitchen; he probably went for a second meal. No; he had not been there. The wardmen were angry and called him various kinds of "assorted" names. S. had simply vanished.

After an hour, S. stalked quietly through the door and sat down near the stove, as unconcerned and leisurely as if his departure had been the most natural thing in the world. I went over and stood in front of him.

"Where were you, S.? The wardmen have been looking for you all over the neighborhood."

"I? Over to see the major. Before going to the hospital I signed the payroll, but never got my money, because I took sick. I thought I'd go over and get it."

"And did you get it?"

"Sure. The major said he thought I was going to

die; but I told him: 'Major, you can't keep a good man down.' So I got my money and went over to Madame Rose's."

"To Madame Rose's? You don't mean to tell me you took some booze, do you?"

"Aw, I had to have a glass, just to see how it tasted. Brrr! But the stuff was bitter! So I took five hookers and came back."

I looked at him in amazement. Five glasses of hard liquor after such a ravaging illness! Should I get angry, or laugh it off? I laughed it off. One could not argue with a man like that. Outside I met a wardman and told him of S.'s return. With a few long leaps he entered the ward and closed the door, and I, discreetly, walked away.

If S. and others worried me, some were a joy and consolation. Thus, one Sunday morning after services, on my rounds through the hospital wards I came upon a colored soldier very ill with pneumonia. I feared he would not outlive the day.

"How are you today, buddy?"

"Fine—suh!"

They all said that, even if they were on the point of death. Whether it was a frame of mind, or just a habit, or ignorance of the real condition of things, was hard to say.

"Well, bud, this is Sunday. Of course, you are too sick to go to services. Shall I say a prayer with you?"

"Aw right—suh."



I made acts of faith, hope, charity, and perfect contrition. When I finished, he looked at me with his fever-burning eyes and said:

"Dat was a—fine—prayah, suh. Thank you—suh!"

"That's nice. Now listen. When you feel all right and happen to think of it, don't forget to say a little prayer once in awhile."

"Oh—ah always—prays—suh. De good Lawd ain't—goin' to ketch me—unprepa'ed."

He closed his eyes and, in a short while, slumbered soundly. He had done it with all the simplicity of a child. He recovered, too.

All in all, the work in the camp hospital was the most fruitful of spiritual good. Quite naturally. The relation between the chaplain and the men became more intimate here, due to the personal contacts that could be established through daily visits and conversations. It provided the chaplain with the desired opportunity to gauge the spiritual needs of individual characters.

Outside the hospital the occasions to meet the men on a heart-to-heart basis were far rarer. Several officers and men visited me regularly, and in this manner delightful friendships grew up between us. These, however, were the exceptions, and they needed no special attention. The ones who might have derived the most benefit from a closer relation with their chaplain were, no doubt, those who avoided him with studious care.

It had to be expected that among five thousand men many would not be as faithful in the performance of their religious duties in France as they would be at home under the eyes of solicitous parents. Wrenched away from the accustomed moorings of home life and thrown into entirely new channels where the current ran swift and the surroundings were strange, there was bound to be some driftwood floating around in camp. The great majority of Catholic men, though, remained staunch and true. Defections happened, of course; but returns to the fold also.

"The Army," it has often been stated, "either makes or breaks." For many it was indeed their making; and through the war great numbers rebuilt their shattered faith. The contact with loyal Catholic comrades proved very often a determining factor. Their good example and, in many instances, their truly wonderful missionary spirit became a powerful influence for good in this respect.

Thus one day, while walking down the valley road to camp headquarters, a soldier stepped out from between some trucks parked to the side and saluted me. I acknowledged the salute and continued on my way.

"Chaplain!"

I stopped and turned. The soldier walked toward me and said, "Pardon me, sir, for asking. Are you a minister or a Catholic priest?"

"A Catholic priest, buddy. Why?"

"Glad to know you, Father. I was assigned to this camp only a few days ago and wondered whether we

had a priest here. I saw you the other day, but wasn't sure what you were."

"My beard, I suppose?"

He laughed, and so did I. The fact that I took it in good humor put him at ease.

"Yes, that's partly the reason. One isn't used to seeing priests with beards, you know. But then, even outside of that, I couldn't tell; so I thought I'd ask. My name is N., Father."

I introduced myself, and after talking awhile, he remarked:

"Father, I have a bunky who's a great pal of mine. We came over together. I want you to meet him, and then you must give him a good talking to."

"Why? What's the matter with him?"

"Oh, he's a fine fellow, but a bum Catholic. He was baptized, went to a Catholic school, even made his first Communion; but that's about all the farther he got. You know, punk home and all that sort of thing. I talked and talked to him before we left the States to straighten out and go to confession. But he never did. Afraid of the thing, I guess. Now I told him in pretty stiff language that he's not going to leave France until he's done it. He says he will, but I'm not so sure. That's why I want you to give him a talking to."

"All right. Make me acquainted some time. And keep after him. You can perhaps do more good than I can."

We spoke about different things for a time, when suddenly, looking up the road, N. exclaimed:



"By golly, Father, here he comes now. That's luck!" I saw two soldiers coming down the valley road. When they were close, N. shouted:

"Hey, F., come here! And shake a leg!" When he came, N. introduced us, and I could see that F. felt a trifle uncomfortable.

"F., this is the man to whom you are going to make your confession before we move out of this camp to go home."

I laughed heartily, and F. smiled a twisted grin.

"I'll think it over, N."

"That's the way," I remarked. "Just think it over. We have time. I'd be glad to see you do it, though, buddy. And you'll be glad once you have it over with. It won't be as hard as you perhaps imagine. Anytime you're ready, just let me know."

I turned the subject into more congenial topics, told a few comic stories and left, wondering what the outcome would be.

My wondering came to an end a little over a month later. Walking through the camp one afternoon, I saw N. come jumping through the mud toward me. His face was one great smile and his eyes beamed gloriously.

"Good day, Father. I have some news for you that you'll like. F. finally consented to go to confession."

"Really? Nice piece of work on your part, N. Congratulations. And I'm certainly happy to hear it."

"So am I, Father; I'm tickled pink. But it was some job. Now, then, Father, when can you fix him up?"

"Anytime you say. Set your own day and time; I'll arrange myself accordingly."

"How about Wednesday night then, day after tomorrow, about seven thirty?"

"Suits me."

"Shall we come to your place, Father?"

"We are likely to be disturbed. Let us go over to the château chapel. No one will bother us there, and F. can take all the time he wants. If I'm not at the place when you reach it, wait for me. The chapel is usually closed, and I'll have to get the key. Now be sure that F. comes along and does not back out at the last minute."

"He'll come. Otherwise I'll take him by the nape of the neck and the seat of the pants and drag him over!"

"No violence, N. I really wouldn't want you to hurt him, you know!"

Laughingly we parted. He loved to appear just a trifle "hard-boiled," I think; but he was not "tough" in the least. Stamping away, he whistled a stave from some popular melody; and I went on, with a sensation in my soul that the world was after all a wonderful place.

That Wednesday night after supper I went to the camp hospital, and forgot my appointment entirely! I kept on going from bed to bed, never thinking of the chapel nor of F. and his confession!

It was fully two days later when the thought struck me with the impact of a bullet that I had bungled this

most important thing. My heart gave a perceptible thump and then sank slowly in my bosom. I felt horribly miserable. In fancy I saw the two lads waiting at the chapel for me, F. nervous and fidgety, N. bracing up his courage. It had perhaps taken F. every ounce of good will to go along with N. And then they waited and waited there in the cold, wet night; and I did not come! Would F. muster up enough will power for a second attempt? The fact that my memory had played a nasty trick on me in a critical moment, humbled me greatly, and gave me no consolation.

Now what? I could apologize to both lads and express my sincerest regrets. Would that remedy the situation? Perhaps; perhaps not. But I had to try.

The quarters of both men were unknown to me; so I had to keep on the lookout for them wherever I went. But days and days passed, and neither of them crossed my field of vision. What a torture for nearly two weeks!

At last, one afternoon, I noticed N. coming toward me; he noticed me, too. Now the dreaded moment had arrived. My little speech of apology had been made long ago, but I felt very ill at ease. Not even my maiden sermon caused me such genuine heartache. The face of N. was very serious and sober; and I could not blame him, for I had spoiled a perfectly lovely affair at which he had labored so long. As soon as he came near me, I began.

"Glad to see you, N. I've been looking for you a long time. You know—"



"Yes, Father, I know. You mean about that Wednesday night."

"Yes, I'm very sorry—"

"I know what you're going to say, Father. I can imagine how you felt. I would feel the same way, I suppose. And—"

"Well now, N., when Wednesday night came around—"

"Now, Father, I admit it was an ugly thing to make an appointment and not keep it. But before you begin to bawl us out, please let me explain."

"Explain? What do you mean?"

"Well, Father, first of all I want to apologize in the name of F. and myself for not being at the château chapel Wednesday night. We had every intention of going, but right after supper that night both of us got sudden orders to go on guard duty for the first part of the night. It came absolutely unexpected, and the rotten part of it was that we had no way of letting you know. But you know how it is in the army, Father: 'Orders is orders, and pigs is pigs,' as the boys say. Really, Father, both of us couldn't help it; honestly. Shucks, I felt blue all night. And there you must have been waiting at the chapel for us two dubs to fall in line, and we never showed up. I don't blame you a bit for getting mad at us. I'd do the same. But as sure as I'm standing here, we wanted to be there. On the level, Father!"

While N. stood there, pleading with me with such earnestness, I hardly believed my ears. Of all things!

Neither party made its appearance at the chapel that night! And each side accused itself!

Should I keep quiet about my own little predicament? They would not know the difference. But no; under the circumstances it was too good a story to withhold from these splendid lads. They would certainly enjoy it, and it would make them feel easier. So I told N. what had happened to me that night. He blinked his eyes, while he listened; I could see that he, too, did not know whether he was hearing right. But when I finished, he also realized the humor of the whole situation; and we stood there, rocking from side to side, roaring with laughter. The sinister tragedy had resolved itself into a happy-ending comedy.

Naturally, both of us felt immensely relieved in our minds. I, particularly. We agreed that N. should make new arrangements with F. and then inform me.

About a week later, on a Saturday night, I heard confessions in the château chapel. After having confessed, one of the lads said to me: "Do you know me, Father?"

"Know you? You mean, whether I know just now who you are? I do not. Why?"

"Well, Father, I am N. I got F. to come along with me tonight. He's next in line and feels very nervous. You'll be kind to him, won't you? Please, Father!"

"Certainly, I'll be kind. You needn't worry."

"Thanks, Father. Good-night."

And in came F. "Father, will you help me?"

“Gladly, my boy.”

That night, as I walked back to the barracks, with Our Lord in my army Pyx, it was cold and damp and cloudy. I tramped through the dark, my hip boots squirching in the oozy mud. But for me the heavens were full of dancing stars and the earth strewn with the fragrant petals of roses!

The next morning F. and N. knelt side by side at Communion and received their Lord from my hands. There were three happy people in camp that day: two soldiers and their chaplain. A belated flower had blossomed in one of my furrows!



## CHAPTER IX

### BEHIND THE BARBED WIRES

It redounds to the everlasting glory of the United States forces that the German war prisoners received an exceptionally kind treatment at their hands. The American soldier was a relentless and implacable fighter against the enemy in arms, but a good-natured and kind-hearted master over the enemy in captivity. A foe behind the barbed-wire entanglements of the front is one thing; a foe behind the barbed-wire fence of a prison stockade is another: to the former he gave a bullet; to the latter, a billet.

This was the spirit that prevailed in our camp. Close to two thousand German prisoners were assigned to us. They were used for roadwork, for the loading and unloading of freight, for the hauling of materials around the shops, and for similar kinds of rough labor. Their work was hard, but scarcely any harder than that of our own men working in the shops and out in the yards, and their hours were about the same.

Reveille sounded at five thirty for the whole camp, including prisoners. Breakfast at six, and at six thirty the companies were formed and marched under guard down to the shops. The entire shop area was encircled by sentry boxes with guards, set at regular intervals,

forming the "chain-guard area." The prisoners in this area were "turned loose," to go to their respective places of work, but were never allowed to go outside this "chain-guard area." If necessity demanded them to work somewhere else, they had to be accompanied by individual guards. A single guard would have charge of no more than ten to fifteen prisoners, called "chasing."

At a quarter of twelve the Germans were escorted to their stockades for dinner, and at one o'clock were again marched back to work. At five their day's labor ended, at six they received their supper, and the remaining hours of the evening were their leisure time.

Sunday was observed as a day of rest, as far as the exigencies of war would permit. Even work of a necessary or emergency character was cut down to the minimum of requirements. As far as possible, our men were spared and prisoners sent out; but usually not more than fifty or a hundred prisoners were compelled to labor on a Sunday. The rest had the day to themselves, except that at ten in the morning they underwent inspection by the officers of the Prisoners of War Escort Company.

These officers had immediate responsibility for the control and welfare of all prisoners in the camp. The Colonel possessed no direct jurisdiction over them further than the general camp regulations were concerned. He could demand prisoners for work, and it devolved upon the captain of the P.W.E. Company

to furnish him with the required number; but the management and discipline of the stockades rested entirely in the hands of the captain. He stood under orders to the Provost Marshal General of the A. E. F. and made his requisitions to him. On the other hand, the commanding officer of the P. W. E. Company depended upon the camp authorities for many things that concerned the welfare of his prisoners, like food and quarters.

The food of the prisoners was the same as that issued to our men. Coffee, soup, bacon, and bread were given at breakfast. The noon and evening meals consisted of corned beef, canned salmon, baked beans, potatoes, or stew; or, as the army slang had it—"corn-willy, deep-sea turkey, bullets, murphies, slumgullion." Occasionally there would be a slight change in the menu. The monotony of frequency formed the one disagreeable feature of this otherwise very substantial and nourishing table d'hôte fare. German cooks prepared the meals.

Like our soldiers the prisoners were quartered in wooden army barracks. The usual "double-deck" bunks, made of slats, served as beds. The Army did not, of course, furnish the conveniences of modern hotels; but it provided against the inclemency of the weather and protected the soldier's health, as far as circumstances permitted.

The German noncoms, under their own sergeant major, kept order in their respective stockades, saw to their policing, regulated all duties, settled all dis-



putes, and preserved discipline among their fellow prisoners; always, naturally, subject to the supervision and authority of the American C. O. of the P. W. E. Company. The latter issued orders to the German sergeant major, and he had to see that the orders were carried out. Thus each of the four stockades formed a little community unto itself. The discipline, though strict, was in no sense harsh, for the American officers were uniformly kind toward their charges.

On one occasion the Provost Marshal General issued a communication to all P. W. E. officers, and this had to be read to the prisoners. If prisoners felt they had just reason to complain of severe and inhuman treatment on the part of the American soldiers or officers placed over them, they could register a formal complaint to the Provost Marshal General, and the authorities would have the matter investigated and the conditions remedied, if the facts were found to be as stated. The Germans merely smiled when I translated the communication to them, which meant as much as an acknowledgment that they were perfectly satisfied with their treatment. Except for the restriction of freedom of movement, their lot was not bad with us Americans.

Only one case ever came to my attention where an American soldier of our camp transgressed the line of proper conduct prescribed by international law toward an enemy soldier. A prisoner had been found sleeping in a box car during working hours. This made one of our soldiers angry and he struck the prisoner

with his fist, but he was reported, court-martialed, and sent to the guardhouse. One is never allowed to use physical force against any soldier, even if he is an enemy. The soldier should have reported the delinquency of the prisoner, and the prisoner would have been punished by the captain of the Escort Company.

Prisoners seldom made trouble, because they were disciplined too well, and they realized the futility of any such action. For the same reason, they made no attempt to escape, with one exception. One day four German prisoners succeeded in getting away. Three of these were laborers near the shops. They smuggled old clothes under their slickers and hid them among the great piles of war material stored in the yards. The fourth man, named Frederick, had been a trusty around the P. W. E. officers' quarters. Being an artist and painter by profession, the officer in charge permitted him to paint pictures, using the officer's barrack for a studio; an act of kindness and consideration that the prisoner betrayed to his own advantage.

They planned a simple scheme. All four were to hide among the stacks of material in the shop area—a thing easy to do—and escape under cover of darkness. One difficulty had to be overcome for the plan to succeed. When the prisoners left the stockade for work, a careful check was made, and when they returned, a similar check would determine the fact that the same number came back. In case of a discrepancy in numbers, the prisoners were lined up along their bunks, and an exact count made. If anyone should

be found missing, the camp would be searched. When a prisoner working some distance away could not return in time to join his company, he would come straggling back alone. The four prisoners had to forestall the possibility of such a search, and the only way they could do this was to have the same number checked in at night as were checked out at noon. It so happened at this time that small groups of prisoners were working for a period of days in a garden outside their stockade. They went in and out quite frequently, and so an exact check on their number was quite difficult to maintain.

The conspirators arranged with four of these to hide among the bushes along the road at the time when the column of shop laborers would return in the evening. As these passed, the four garden workers were to slip into the column unnoticed and be checked in with them. In this manner the number would be the same as at noon, and the absence of the four prisoners would not be detected for perhaps a day or two, giving them the opportunity of making a rapid dash for Switzerland and Germany.

It seemed the plan could not miscarry; but it did. Three of the four garden workers managed to slip in among their fellow prisoners returning to the stockade; the fourth, however, was seen by one of the guards and ordered out. He never succeeded in getting counted in with the rest, and the check-up showed one prisoner missing. The captain was notified, but waited awhile to see whether the straggler would not



soon return. Finally he ordered the prisoners to line up, and imagine his surprise to find *four* men absent instead of merely one! An immediate search revealed nothing, so he sent an alarm out over the entire countryside. The next afternoon a telephone call from the town of Luzy, about thirty-five kilometers away, informed our authorities that the four Germans had been captured and were in the French jail. A truck with armed guards rushed off to bring them back to camp.

After supper I spoke to the C. O. about the episode, and he laughed good-heartedly at the attempted escape. Frederick had finished a picture the night before his escape and stuck a German letter in the frame, addressed to the officer. I read it. In the most effusive terms Frederick apologized to the officer for the betrayal of his trust and asked a thousand pardons for causing him all this trouble; but his homesickness became so great that he could not resist the temptation to escape. His main regret was that his action showed ingratitude toward the kind officer. He asked forgiveness and promised to paint any picture for him that he desired; he, Frederick, would defray the expense of sending it to the United States.

"Quite a letter," I said.

"Yes. Magnifique, as the French say. I'm going to keep it as a *souvenir de la guerre*. It's interesting."

"What will happen to these four when they come back?"

"Oh, not much. We'll stick them in their cooler for

awhile, just to teach the Heinies that they shouldn't pull off any more fool stunts. And for Frederick there will be no more painting. He'll go with a labor gang when he gets out of the jug. In a way I feel sorry for the poor duffer; he was a rather decent sort. Of course, one cannot really blame them. If I were a prisoner, and saw a good chance of making a bolt for freedom, you can bet your last frankie that I'd do it. The only mistake these fellows made was to let themselves get caught."

"Do you know how that happened?"

"Why, the four went into a restaurant at Luzy this noon for something to eat, and while sitting there talked German. The waitress happened to be a former Belgian refugee who understood German. She told the proprietor, and he phoned to the gendarmes. Simple business. Now wasn't that clever of my four little squareheads? As clever as an elephant on a tight rope. Such boobs!"

"Will it make any difference in your treatment of the prisoners in general?"

"Oh, no. Why should it? We'll have to be a little more careful, that's all."

Just then there was a hubbub of voices outside and the roar of a truck motor, and a moment later a knock sounded on the door. A soldier stepped inside, stood at attention, and saluted.

"Prisoners arrived, sir!"

"All right, Sergeant. I'll be there in a second. Come along, Padre. Let's take a look at these birds."

Outside a large group of soldiers had gathered. The German prisoners in the stockade had crowded up to the fence, eager to see what was going to happen. One of the acetylene flood-lamps had been turned toward the truck. In a line in front of it stood the four culprits, their guards on both sides. The whole scene looked tragi-comical.

The four were dressed in ill-fitting, nondescript clothes. One stood there, head high, jaw set in utter defiance. Frederick, tall and lanky, head lowered to his chest, arms hanging loosely at his side, presented a picture of dejection and discouragement. The other two were looking about, wild-eyed, actually shaking from head to foot, and I sincerely believe they expected to be shot.

The C. O. of the P. W. E.'s stood in front of them, eyeing them sternly for a little while. Then he bawled out:

"Attention!"

Heels clicked, heads shot up, backs stiffened, eyes riveted themselves upon the officer. He let them stand at attention for a brief space and then said with a sneer:

"Welcome to our city! Figured you could take French leave, eh? Well, we'll teach you to first say good-by next time! Sergeant, take them to their guard-house!"

They were hustled away. Of course, they did not understand a single word said, and they must have spent a night of harrowing expectations. Their pun-



ishment consisted in a month's confinement in the guardhouse, with a daily allowance for exercise in the fresh air. Every morning when the German prisoners went to work and every evening when they returned, these four had to stand and watch the others pass. The razzing which they received from their fellow prisoners formed perhaps their severest punishment. They were eventually returned to their stockade and quartered with the others.

The officer's word proved true: the treatment accorded the war prisoners remained as kind as ever. The officers did all they could to alleviate the hard conditions of captivity.

A canteen, supplied with goods from the Army Commissary, was established in each stockade. Each prisoner received daily twenty centimes (four cents) spending money, consisting of coupons, out of his monthly pay; the rest remained on account to be paid out to him when he would return to Germany. He could purchase little personal necessities and luxuries at the stockade canteen, as cigars, cigarettes, pipe tobacco, candy, toothpaste, combs, and similar articles. The prisoners could buy but little with their allowance; however, it contributed much toward greater contentment.

Another feature, for which the Germans felt appreciative toward these officers, was their assistance in putting on Sunday-night entertainments. The rear portion of the mess hall in each stockade served as a theater. The stage extended about twenty feet back,

with the floor raised four feet from the ground; and the stage opening measured about fifteen by eight feet.

The daily work assigned to the entertainers, consisting of actors and musicians, was the preparation of the next Sunday's show. The officers furnished clothes and materials for costumes, and it was up to the entertainers to make them fit their needs. They developed their own plays, sketches, acts, stunts, and whatever they wished to produce. Considering the fact that these shows started at six thirty in the evening and lasted from two and a half to three hours, and new shows were staged every week, the work connected with the performances must have been quite formidable. Although ordinarily producing only a sort of vaudeville, they at times made and presented dramas.

The orchestra had its interesting history. It began with a single violin. Then some musical genius among the prisoners made a drum out of large tin cans; a few more tins were fashioned into cymbals; a steel rod served for a triangle; and pieces of wood formed a xylophone. Now the prisoners grew ambitious. Necessity is always inventive. Out of wood from our shop the skillful hands of a German carved entire violins. Admired by all who saw them, various officers of the camp registered a claim against each one of the violins, to be taken home as a souvenir at the close of the war. They had good sounding qualities, though not so rich and mellow, of course, as a Stradivarius. The only

accessories that had to be bought were the hair and frogs for the bows and strings. The officers managed also to procure a second-hand cornet and a battered old alto horn, and the orchestra was complete.

At times interesting specialty numbers were on the programs. One young German soldier was a toe dancer who dressed as a danseuse and gave a creditable performance. Their tumblers were good, and the Greco-Roman wrestling matches always drew enthusiastic applause.

Sometimes the captain permitted a few P. W. E. lads to go through a few rounds of boxing at the shows. Thus two colored soldiers of the Escort Co. came to the captain one day and asked for an interview. When he had granted it, one spoke up and said:

"Captain, suh, Bob an' me had an ahgument about sumpin an' we couldn't agree whether ah or he is right. So we thought de best way to settle de ahgument was to fight it out wid boxing gloves: whoevah beats de othah fellah, is right. Can we do that, suh? Dat's de only way we can settle de question."

"Well, Bob, how about putting on this little bout tomorrow night at the German show?"

"Dat'll be fine, suh. Yes, suh, we'll do dat."

They did. And Bob received an uppercut in the very first round that sent him sprawling on the floor of the stage for a space of time considerably in excess of the count of ten! The German prisoners shouted and clapped their applause with such tremendous hilarity, that Sam's chest threatened to burst off the



buttons of his uniform. When Bob finally became conscious, he staggered down from the stage, walked up to Sam, took his hand, and said with a sickly grin:

"Sam, you had de best ahgument aw right!"

This little act of sportsmanship on Bob's part came as a complete surprise to the Germans, and they gave Bob an ovation even greater than the one accorded Sam. Apparently they could not understand how anyone would do such a thing, after being knocked out by the fist of another; but they sensed the fine quality of a man who could take such a lacing in good grace, and it stirred their spirit of chivalry toward their otherwise hated colored guards.

After this preliminary number the regular performance began. The shows, being intended for the amusement of the prisoners, were entirely in German. But at times the programs, translated more or less accurately into English, were distributed among the twenty to thirty Americans present. The following program was rendered on November 10, the night before the Armistice. Except for the fact that it contains no elaborate playlet, it gives a fairly good idea of the prisoner's average Sunday entertainment. It is copied verbatim as I received it, with mistakes and all.

# WALHALLA THEATER.

\* \* \*

Programm, Sunday 10, Novbr.

- |                                 |      |             |
|---------------------------------|------|-------------|
| 1.) March . . . . .             | by . | Music Band. |
| 2.) Prologue . . . . .          | by . | R. Peterson |
| 3.) The Merry Quartet . . . . . | " .  | 4 Singers   |
| 4.) Song . . . . .              | " .  | 4 Club      |

- |      |                                      |                                 |                  |
|------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| 5.)  | I don't Marry . . .                  | " .                             | 2 act Comedy.    |
| 6.)  | Violin Solo . . .                    | " .                             | Sergt. Brauer.   |
| 7.)  | Humorous Report . . .                | " .                             | Pilarski.        |
| 8.)  | ? ? ? Humorous Dance                 | " .                             | 6 Clown's.       |
| 9.)  | Waltz . . . . .                      | " .                             | Music Band.      |
| 10.) | Speech . . . . .                     | " .                             | Weissmann.       |
| 11.) | Song . . . . .                       | " .                             | Singer Club.     |
| 12.) | 5 Tumblers . . . . .                 | " .                             |                  |
| 13.) | The Duel . . . . .                   | " .                             | Circus Joke.     |
| 14.) | Violin Solo . . . . .                | " .                             | Sergt. Brauer.   |
| 15.) | The Lost Son . . .                   | by .                            | Moving Pictures. |
| 16.) | The burth-day present                | " .                             | 1 act Joke.      |
| 17.) | March . . . . .                      | " .                             | Music Band.      |
| 18.) | The Changed Overcoat                 | " .                             | 1 act Joke.      |
| 19.) | Circus Joke . . . . .                | " .                             |                  |
| 20.) | Song . . . . .                       | " .                             | Singer Club.     |
| 21.) | March . . . . .                      | by 2 Violin's and Xylophone.    |                  |
| 22.) | Violin Solo . . . . .                | Sergt. Brauer, Pott, Breitkopf. |                  |
| 23.) | Mask's ball of the Walhalla Company. |                                 |                  |
| 24.) | March . . . . .                      | by .                            | Music Band.      |

Whatever the "moving pictures" of the fifteenth number on the program may have been in the mind of the one who wrote the above, I do not know; but they never had motion pictures in our sense of the word. In this instance, if I remember rightly, the story was worked out in a series of tableau effects.

As a rule, their plays were clean in substance and tone. They were, of course, written up entirely by the prisoners themselves, patterned perhaps after plays they had seen at home. The type of the more lengthy plays may be judged from some of the titles: "Das Perlenkollier," (The Pearl Necklace) in four acts; "Die Lustigen Studenten," (The Jolly Students); "Zahnschmerzen," (Toothache); "Leichte Liebe,"

(Light Love), a drama in three acts; "Der Raub der Sabinerinnen," (The Rape of the Sabines) a comedy in three acts; "For a Woman," a cowboy drama in five acts.

The shows had all the merits and defects of the environment in which they were made and played; but for the German prisoner they constituted the great recreational feature of his drab existence in captivity. To be excluded from witnessing a show was the severest disciplinary measure that could be meted out to a prisoner for infraction of rules and regulations; he would have preferred a diet of bread and water. In this way, the weekly shows fostered by the P. W. E. officers proved to be a powerful ally in maintaining discipline and furthering the social welfare of their charges.

The spiritual welfare of the German prisoners was left to the chaplain of the camp, and, being the only chaplain conversant with their language, this duty devolved upon me. On account of the division of the prison camp into four separate stockades and the restriction naturally placed upon their movements, I could hardly give them any general religious services. The Catholic prisoners were always permitted to attend Mass on Sundays. As long as the weather remained agreeable, I arranged field Mass to be held in the space between the second and third stockades, so that the prisoners would have no difficulty in being present. During the winter I read early Mass at the



Engineers' Camp at Marcy on one Sunday and on the next Sunday at 7:45 at the prison camp. Every Sunday, camp Mass took place at 8:45 in the Y building, and the Catholic German prisoners were marched up under guard to attend. Thus their religious welfare received the proper care.

The commanding officer of the P. W. E. Company granted me free access to the stockades at any time, with the privilege of speaking to any and all prisoners. On a few occasions, German prisoners asked and received permission to confer with me privately, and came with a guard to my quarters to seek advice and counsel. While we conversed together, a guard stood outside near my door.

When German soldiers took sick, they were transferred to the camp hospital. Absolutely no distinction existed in the medical treatment and care given them and our own lads: a patient was simply a patient. And if he died, we buried him in our cemetery, though apart from the American section.

A burial with full military honors, equal to that of an American of the same rank, was accorded each enemy soldier. In my first military funeral, that of a young German, neither the lieutenant in charge of the guard nor I knew whether he would be entitled to full military honors; so on the spur of the moment we decided to give him the customary volley. Later I investigated, and found that military courtesy demanded equal treatment of friend and foe, and that

they were entitled to drape the coffin with their colors. A flag, of course, they did not have; so they took flour sacking, sewed the strips together, and painted the outer panels black and red respectively, in order to have the black-white-red flag of the Fatherland decorate the coffin of their comrade.

The confessions of the Catholic German prisoners I always heard on Friday nights. My first experience made quite an impression on me. I had walked down the road in the thickening darkness and turned off toward Stockade 2. Big acetylene lamps with reflectors flooded the place with light. In the center of the barbed-wire inclosure was a large double-doored gate of wire.

When I had come to within perhaps thirty feet of this gate, the guard stepped forth from his sentry box, rifle in both hands across his body, and shouted: "Halt!"

Aha, I thought, someone is too near, and kept on going.

Again the sentry shouted. This time sterner, sharper, louder: "Halt!"

Someone, I said to myself, ought to be a little more careful around this place. I wondered whom the sentry might be halting; so I glanced back as I took a step or two forward. No one there. Then, to my dismay, it dawned on me that he was halting *me*! I stopped dead and looked toward that worthy soldier, whose ugly looking bayoneted rifle pointed right at

my stomach! A tingling sensation crept slowly up my spine. A sergeant stood at the side of the sentry, his hand resting carelessly on the butt of his automatic.

"Who goes there?"

"The Chaplain of the camp."

"Advance, Chaplain, and be recognized."

I had never gone through this procedure before, nor had I ever seen it done, and looking so straight at the business end of an army rifle, filled me with deep respect for law and order. Did he mean that I should step closer? Or what did he mean? I felt rather dubious about taking a chance on my ignorance of military regulations. So with a sheepish grin I said: "What do I do now, Sergeant?"

He smiled, and replied: "Just step up slowly, sir, until the guard tells you to halt again."

Simple, indeed. I stepped forward, gingerly and slowly, keeping my eye rigidly fixed upon the majesty of the law held in that lad's two hands.

"Halt! What do you want, Chaplain?"

"I want to go into this stockade, to hear confessions. Captain Douglas gave me permission."

"Our orders are to leave no one in after six o'clock, sir. However, we'll ask the Captain."

Then the guard called out with a loud voice:

"Corporal of the Guard, Post Number One! Corporal of the Guard, Post Number One!"

The slamming of a door, a rush of feet, a figure dashing past, a salute.

"Sergeant?"



"Go to Captain Douglas and ask him whether it's all right to let the Chaplain into the stockade."

He saluted and disappeared. After a minute a window opened, the Captain thrust out his head, and said to the sergeant:

"The Chaplain may go in at any time and stay as long as he wants to. Good evening, Padre."

"Good evening, Captain."

The sergeant let me enter. Quite a number of Germans had gathered about having heard the sentry's challenge. I asked for the sergeant major of the stockade, and told him I would like to have all the Catholics assembled. He gave his command.

"Katholische Mannschaften sich versammeln! Im Speisesaal.—Catholic soldiers, assemble! In the mess hall."

A few soldiers scurried about, carrying out the command. In a short while they were assembled. Hardly had we entered the mess hall, when the sergeant major barked out, curt and sharp:

"Achtung!—Attention!"

About one hundred bodies jerked up straight and two hundred eyes stared toward me. They stood, rigid and motionless. Now, this was not to my liking. I intended to say a few words, and I did not want them to stand at attention. So I explained to the sergeant major what I desired. Again he commanded, "Rrrrührt euch!—At ease!" And one hundred bodies relaxed.

I told them briefly that I had come to hear the con-

fessions of those who wished to receive on Sunday morning, at seven o'clock. Those who wished to make use of the opportunity should stay, and the rest could go.

The sergeant major looked at me inquiringly, and I nodded. He turned toward them and barked out his command:

"Mannschaften, entlassen!—Soldiers, dismissed!"

They broke ranks, some leaving, some staying. I looked at the sergeant, smiled and said:

"Gut gemacht, Herr Sergeant!—Fine, Sergeant!"

He smiled his appreciation of the compliment, bowed, stepped backwards, saluted, wheeled on his heel, and walked out. Ah, that was military!

I asked the remaining soldiers where it would be best to hear their confessions, and they suggested the stage. So they put a table upon the stage, covered it with a clean blanket, and then placed a handmade stool next to it. Someone brought a small acetylene lamp with a tiny but very bright flame, made by the prisoners.

I sat down on the stool, rested my left arm on the table, shielded my eyes with my left hand, and placed my right hand on my knee. A prisoner would come up on the stage behind the curtain, kneel in front of me and make his confession.

One Polish soldier came, knelt down, and asked me in broken German whether I could speak Polish. I told him that I could neither speak nor understand the language, so he confessed in German. I had given him

absolution and dropped my right hand, my eyes being still closed, when suddenly I felt my right hand grasped tightly. I was so taken by surprise, that a sudden scare shot through my body. I jerked my hand away, rose from the chair, and clenched my fist. He might be a fanatical patriot, probably half demented from the strain of war, who saw before him an unarmed enemy officer. He still knelt in front of me, so I asked him: "Was willst du?—What do you want?"

He smiled a guileless smile up at me, held out his hand, took mine gently by the fingers, drawing them down toward himself, and—reverently he kissed them!

I blushed furiously. That was the Polish way of thanking a priest for the gift of absolution, and I thought he had intended to harm me!

I heard forty confessions that first Friday night at the stockade, and I felt quite satisfied.

Next Sunday morning at Mass, after my own lads had marched up to the altar to receive, the German prisoners also came up in line, knelt in the same spot, and received from my hands the Bread of Life.

Khaki and green-gray, both knelt there, children of the same great Father in heaven, forgetful of all the bitterness of war, in the silence of their adoration. To me it was inspiring.



## CHAPTER X

### STRAINS AND RELIEFS

October blustered through the land.

The early part of the month had been sunny and balmy, but mid-October saw the beginning of the rainy season. Gray mists crept over the valley and the hills, holding everything in the shadows of a clammy, dripping semidarkness. The mists thickened into cold, penetrating drizzles, and then, without warning, the rain would fall in long, straight, glistening sheets, churning the countryside into brooks of muddy water.

Around the hospital, about the tents, and wherever the thousands of hurrying soldiers' feet frequently passed, the ground had become slopped into patches and stretches of soft, clinging mud. This was particularly true of the yards and open spaces adjoining the shops. "French chocolate soup," the boys called it.

And the nights became damp and cold. My orderly, Frank Ryan, filled the small stove in my tent with wood each night before taps. Soon the place would be swelteringly hot. Buried beneath the blankets, little rills of perspiration would trickle down my face to the air pillow, and I would feel decidedly uncomfortable. Then the process reversed. The fire quickly burned

out, leaving me chill and miserable, and the morning invariably found me shivering in the ice-cold air.

Fortunately, this situation was being remedied. In view of the oncoming winter, barracks were built in sections and shipped to the camp. The officers' quarters stood ready for occupancy on October twentieth and we moved in. The rooms were just plain partition walls, perhaps eight by ten, without a ceiling; one could hear everything spoken in the other rooms, unless the voices dropped to a whisper. The window panes were made of cloth.

The day after we moved in, I invited a few of my more intimate officer friends for a little house-warming party at my "château": Captains Bauer, Ostermeyer, Silk, Keith, and "Smoky" Ryan. We had some champagne from Madame Rose's to promote joviality and cement our friendship. Captain Schaible also dropped in and partook of the "giggle-wine."

Soon the men's barracks also stood in line, each one furnished with "double-deck" bunks. Now the winter held no terrors in prospect. The stove in the center formed a convenient spot for us to congregate in the evening, and this helped to foster a closer acquaintanceship among the various groups. With the rain and the mud outside, the darkness of night settling down before six o'clock, and no towns nearby to which one could go, life became miserably monotonous in camp, and the men sought the comfort of the barracks after their day's hard labor.

The folks at home benefited by this combination of

circumstances, for now the boys wrote their long-delayed letters. That meant, though, an added burden for the officers; it being their duty to censor the soldiers' mail.

Every evening I had a stack of letters to look through, an irksome and tedious duty, but one no officer could shirk. Censorship was necessary, and the regulations specific. Any information of military value to the enemy had to be deleted. This included the location of our camp and shops; description of military work; criticism of subsistence and conditions of life among ourselves or the Allies; denunciation of military authority and discipline; and matters of a similar nature. As a rule the men abided by the regulations; at times, however, the officers found it necessary to wield the blue pencil.

Occasionally a flash of comedy in the letters would relieve the strain of the censor. Thus, the soldiers were not allowed to write more than the words "Somewhere in France," to indicate their whereabouts overseas, so some of them gave their general location as "Somewhere in the Mud." The prying eyes of the censorial inquisitor always passed this over with a twinkle. In writing to his mother one lad made the facetious observation: "While crossing the ocean I often stood at the railing and wondered and wondered where all the water came from to fill out this tremendous space; now I know—it comes from the rains of sunny France!"

We were many miles behind the front, but one lad



wrote the following to his sweetheart: "Hundreds of shells are bursting all around me." And then he added the illuminating remark in explanation: "I am K. P. (Kitchen Police) today, and we are having eggs for supper." The shells that were bursting with such terrifying noise were nothing but innocent—eggshells!

The oddest experience in all my labors as censor occurred one night, when a soldier requested a favor.

"A favor?" I asked. "What is it?"

"Father, will you censor a letter for me?"

The request seemed rather peculiar. I did not know the lad, so I suspected something wrong.

"Do you belong to my unit?"

"No, Father, I belong to 301."

"Then why don't you take your letter to one of your own officers? They are supposed to censor your mail."

"Yes, I know. But I'm sure any ordinary officer would throw it into the wastebasket after reading it."

"Is there so much censorable stuff in it?"

"No, there's nothing in it at all that would have to be cut out."

"Then what makes you say that an officer would throw it away? He's not allowed to do that. I think you're making a rather strong accusation there, my lad."

"But I'm sure he would, Father. Won't you look at it?"

And he handed me an unsealed envelope. I drew out the letter, and looked at the lad in surprise; he

grinned. The envelope contained a very long strip of paper about an inch wide, folded together in a peculiar way. I grasped the one loose end, and the rest of it slipped to the floor like an uncoiled snake. I read:

"Darling M. This is the longest letter any girl ever received from her beau." The whole letter went on in that strain. It was indeed the longest letter I had ever seen—fully ten feet long! I pulled the entire length through my fingers; then I attached my O. K. and signature, not at the bottom, but at the tail end of this paper serpent.

Holding the strip, I said, "How in the world do you get this bloomin' thing back to the way you had it?"

"See!" the lad exclaimed triumphantly. "You don't know what to do with it! Don't you think, Father, that an officer would simply throw it into the wastebasket?"

"I guess you're right, buddy. And I don't know whether I could blame him. Fold it up yourself then."

He crisscrossed the strip forwards and backwards, until it had the shape of letter paper, and eased it gently into the envelope. After sealing it, I signed the front of the envelope, and thus some girl in the States became the happy possessor of the longest love letter ever sent from the A. E. F.

The days passed, drab and colorless, with much hard work and many onerous duties. There was little relaxation. In the evening the men played cards and checkers, and the more adventurous indulged surrep-

titiously in a game of "galloping dominoes."

October twenty-fifth brought a memorable event for the officers. The Count du Faye had moved to Nice with his family, to spend the winter at the Riviera, and we rented his château as an officers' club for a monthly rental of fifteen hundred francs. The opening night brought an informal American party. Army nurses from the hospital center at Mars traveled forty miles in trucks to be present for the dance. Our camp orchestra furnished the music.

During the course of the evening, while sitting on a sofa, engaged in conversation with one of the officers, I was rather startled to hear a nurse's voice address me:

"May I have the next dance with you, sir?"

I looked up at her in surprise; but she smiled at me naively and asked again: "May I?"

I hardly know whether I blushed; but I was certainly flustered. Then I stood up and, smiling at her, replied:

"Would you mind looking at my shoulder, Miss? I do not dance."

She saw the cross on my shoulder strap, gasped, and said with evident embarrassment: "Oh, I beg your pardon!"

I bowed, she bowed; she moved away, I sat down again; and the officer laughed until the tears ran down his face.

The dance over, the nurses returned to Mars, to be on duty in the morning. The party proved a great



success amid the elegant surroundings of the château. Parties like this were held every Saturday night, but the club remained open to members at all times. The furniture of the place and the Count's library produced an atmosphere akin to home life, which made it very welcome during the weary months of autumn and winter.

The outstanding feature of our camp life, before the Armistice, was a musical comedy, written by one of our men and staged at our theater in the Y building. This theater represented a masterpiece of construction. It had a full-size stage with proscenium arch, curtain, drops, stage sets, footlights, and pit for the musicians. Up against the first set of rafters and crossbeams in front of the stage the carpenters built a booth, hanging there like a pigeon coop, from which spotlights, made out of automobile headlamps, were projected upon the stage.

The proscenium arch had a height of about twelve feet and a length of about thirty; and here, too, the resourcefulness of our men showed itself. They covered the arch with sheet metal and worked out a beautiful decorative design over the stage front, painting it all in imitation of marble; the sheet metal, however, was nothing more than cast-off bacon tins! True to the boast that our organization contained members of every trade and profession, scenic artists came forward and painted the curtain, drops, sets, and whatever properties were needed. Skilled stage electricians

produced lighting effects nearly as perfect and elaborate as those in the large theaters of our big cities. A truly remarkable achievement.

The formation of our band and orchestra had a similar development. Plenty of excellent musicians existed in camp, but they had no instruments. In the course of time they managed to pick up instruments and music in various places, until at last they were fully equipped. By dint of ceaseless efforts in the face of most trying difficulties they were eventually rounded out into a well-drilled and finely balanced ensemble which contributed essentially toward the phenomenal success of our musical comedy.

This comedy was entitled "A Buck on Leave," and its central idea had an interesting local origin. Fritz Schweitzer, one of our boys, possessed the distinction of being the first of the organization to obtain a furlough to Aix-les-Bains, immediately after this famous watering place was opened to the American soldier. Now Fritz looked as German as his name; and the reason, it developed later, for singling him out for this furlough was that the Intelligence Department (wrongly, no doubt,) had him under secret observation.

On Schweitzer's return some of the lads gathered around and made him recount his experiences. When Fritz related that he had slept between white sheets in a real bed, had eaten off china dishes, could walk in the lobby of the hotel and sit in any chair, and lived

there on an equal footing with officers, one of the boys sat there with his big eyes dancing with joy, and interrupted Schweitzer by saying:

"You mean to tell us that officers cut no extra figure there and that you could tell them what you thought, without fear of being court-martialed?"

And when Schweitzer answered "Yes," this lad jumped into the air and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Oh, Boy!"

This little episode formed the factual background upon which Pat Barnes, who also had been listening, worked out the idea of "A Buck on Leave" and wrote the lines of the play. The production of the play, however, presented some problems.

The play demanded a chorus of girls, and the soldiers were very reluctant about taking girls' parts, but eventually accepted. Now, where to find costumes for them? To help matters out, Pat Barnes traveled on a truck train to Paris and, with the aid of an interpreter, visited various costume houses. But these had not been opened since the beginning of the war in 1914, and the dust lay inches thick. Out of four houses, the only things he could find were about eight dresses, some of them, as Barnes humorously remarked, dating from the time of Louis XV. One chorus called for nurses' outfits, but there were no nurses nearby from whom to borrow them; so they got a clean white tent from the quartermaster supply rooms, cut it up and, with the aid of a few Italian tailors in the camp, made it into nurses' costumes.



Tragedy also had a little part in the production of this comedy. The lad who had listened so enthusiastically to the narrative of Schweitzer was slated to be the Buck; but during rehearsals he took sick with the flu and died. So Pat Barnes, the author, stepped in and played the role of the Buck.

The night of the play, October twenty-ninth, arrived. Colonel Hegeman and all officers were present. The men filled the theater to its utmost capacity, a noisy but orderly crowd. Programs were passed around, and this is what I read on the title-page:

The personnel of the Motor Transport Reconstruction Park,  
under the command of Colonel Harry A. Hegeman, presents

#### A BUCK ON LEAVE

Lyrics	by	Augustus Brunelle
Book	by	Pat Barnes
Music	by	Gordon Laughead

Under the able direction of Lieut. Gordon Laughead, the orchestra, consisting of thirty pieces, swung into the overture—full, impressive, majestic. The audience listened spellbound, when, in the midst of it, something happened that drew their attention entirely away from the music. A soldier, with a French girl clinging languorously to his arm, walked down the main aisle of the theater and sat down with her in the second row of the officers' section. An M.P. noticed them and approached the soldier.

"I'm sorry, bud; you can't sit here."

"What's that?"

"I say, you'll have to move back farther; you can't sit here."

"Why can't I?"

"Because this is the Officers' Reserved Section. Enlisted men's seats are back there."

The M. P. took the soldier by the arm. He resisted and a scuffle ensued. The soldier raised his voice.

"Let go of me! I'm here now and I'm going to stay!"

"No, you're not going to stay! Your place is back there. You'll have to move!"

The officers looked around; the enlisted men rose in their seats to see what could be the matter; the orchestra leader turned around and asked for order; and some of the players forgot to play their instruments. The soldier cried out:

"Well, I'm not going to move! Can't you see that I'm here with my girl?"

"I don't care whether you have a girl or not. You can't stay here, that's all. Now go back to where you belong!"

By this time the entire orchestra had stopped playing. The affair produced an awkward interruption. The soldier was perhaps drunk. Colonel Hegeman half rose in his chair.

"I won't go! And I'd like to see the one who is going to make me!"

"I'll make you go. And if you don't go in ten sec-

onds, I'll throw you into the guardhouse and you'll go up for court-martial."

"What do I care for your guardhouse or your court-martial! You can't bust me!"

Then he stood up and shouted in a ringing, singing voice:

"For I'm only a Buck Private!"

And with a tremendous crash of music, the orchestra continued its overture and ended in a grand climax of harmony, while the soldier and the girl walked down the front, up to the stage, and bowed to the audience with a broad happy smile! It was all a part of the show, introducing Pat Barnes, who took the part of the Buck. For a number of seconds the audience sat dazed and did not realize that it had been hoaxed; but as soon as the fact dawned upon the men, a roar of laughter and applause thundered through the hall!

And then the real show started. The first scene of the comedy took us to the lobby of the Care-Free Hotel at Aix-les-Bains. Sergeant Xavier Champion of the French army, official interpreter and liaison officer, acted the part of the hotel proprietor. After some patter and a few songs, the proper atmosphere had been created for the entrance of Pat Barnes<sup>1</sup> as the Buck. With a fanfare of trumpets he appeared on the stage, accompanied by "Shorty" Hobbs as his orderly. The combination was screamingly funny:

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<sup>1</sup>Pat Barnes is the well-known radio announcer, formerly with W.H.T. and now with W.G.N., Chicago. He received a citation in General Orders for his meritorious work in connection with the play.



Barnes, thin and long; Hobbs, small and stocky—"sawed off and hammered down," as someone remarked. Both wore misfit issue uniforms: the one of Barnes too short and tight, that of Hobbs too long and baggy.

Hardly had the Buck Private entered the lobby of the hotel, when the proprietor approached and asked for his name. Barnes struck a dramatic pose and answered: "A. Buck!"

Excitedly the proprietor threw up his hands and exclaimed in a tone of ecstatic rapture:

"Ah! Ze Buck!—Ze man wat win ze War!"

He had sounded the keynote of the play: the comical glorification of the plain soldier in the Army. The buck private, ordered about and kicked about by every hard-boiled noncom and callow shavetail, the one who had to do all the odd jobs and dirty work in the service, formed, after all, the backbone of the fighting forces and was, in its last analysis, the chief factor in the winning of victory; and here at least, in the play, he would receive the credit he deserved and be given the place of honor which he so rightly merited. The dramatic idea consisted, therefore, in reversing the usual order of military precedence and turning the army upside down; everybody fulfilled his wishes and catered to his whims. One can imagine the comic situations arising out of such a motif. And so it happened.

In accordance with the military importance of the most august personage in the American Army, the

proprietor offered him the hospitality of his establishment, and placed the hotel's entire staff of entertainers at his disposal. With proper dignity the Buck accepted the honor.

A bevy of pretty girls (all soldiers, of course, dressed, wigged, painted, and primped up, to represent the fairer sex) swarmed about the Buck and showered their attentions upon him, happy to bask in his smile. They sang and danced with him.

And then came a surprise. Two officers stepped into the hotel lobby: Colonel Harry Hegeman, our C. O., and Lieut.-Col. James Florida, our Colonel's right hand! They were doubles; but the illusion was almost complete. This led to one of the most ludicrous incidents of the play. Anyone acquainted with the rigor of military discipline in war time and the utmost respect shown to the highest ranking officer of a camp, can appreciate the humor of the situation that followed. The Buck greeted the two colonels with the frankest familiarity and comraderie, shouting, as he saw them: "Why, hello, Harry! Hello, Jimmy!" Walking up to them he shook hands and inquired about the camp and the boys and how things were going down at Verneuil. The actors had freedom of speech in the play, and the Buck gave them much expert advice about camp conditions in general and officers in particular. Many were the barbed shafts that flew over the footlights into the audience; but they were good-natured in intent and not poisoned with bitterness.

Finally, the Buck invited the two colonels to be his guests during their stay at Aix-les-Bains and share in the entertainments to be given in his honor. The two dignitaries accepted the invitation gladly, and so the Buck became their patronizing host during the rest of the performance.

There were solos, duets, choruses, dialogues, and specialty numbers of various kinds, welded together in the customary musical comedy style. The program follows:

### Scene 1

#### *Interior Care-Free Hotel, Aix-les-Bains*

Opening Chorus—"What'll We Do With Him, Boys?"

	Chorus
Hotel Proprietor . . . . .	Xavier Champion
Clerk . . . . .	Jack Spaulding
Bell Hop . . . . .	Trickey Fox
Song, "A Wild Night" . . . . .	Trickey Fox
Mlle. Naughty Ways . . . . .	Fred L. Houle
Mlle. Alive Number . . . . .	Jack Tinney
Porter 1st Class . . . . .	Joel Barnette
A Bright Jewish Boy . . . . .	Harry Garland
Englishman, Not So Bright . . . . .	Irving Scott
Song, "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up,"	Irving Scott and Chorus
Bill Caruso . . . . .	Larry Young
Three Small-Town Boys . . . . .	J. Fortie, Bob Caine, Herb. Funke
Song, "Home Town" . . . . .	Jewette Fortie and Quartette
A. Buck . . . . .	Pat Barnes
Ambrose . . . . .	"Shorty" Hobbs
Song—"I'm the Brother of 'Lilly of the Valley'"	
. . . . .	Barnes and Girls
Song, "Polly Voo" . . . . .	Barnes and Girls
"Harry" . . . . .	Harle Young
"Jimmy" . . . . .	Percy Franzman



Finale, "Hello, Central, Give Me No Man's Land" . . . . .	Larry Young and Company
Soldier . . . . .	Charles D. Moore
Kiddie . . . . .	A petite Mlle.

## Scene 2

*Exterior Care-Free Hotel, Aix-les-Bains*

String Jazz Band . . . . .	
Harry Boehr, J. Lees, Al. Markgraf, Chas. Markgraf, Joseph Deacon, Walter Alespack, Fred M. Smith	
Song, "Smiles" . . . . .	Larry Young and Chorus
"The New Captain" . . . . .	Barnett and Spaulding
Song, "Drop Me Down In Dixie" . . . . .	Barnett and Spaulding
A Real American Girl . . . . .	Miss Orlo Mays
Song, "Oh, Frenchy" . . . . .	Miss Mays and Chorus
Tucker's Saxophone Artillery . . . . .	
Harry Weiner, John Payne, Jewette Fortie, John B. Lin- coln, Melville Gilleland, Leonard Jamieson, Robt. Russel, Leonard Jamieson, Chas. Haffey, Clifford Curle, Albert Dickey	
Garland and Scott in "Nonsense" . . . . .	
. . . . .	Written by Garland and Scott
Song, "Baby's Prayer" . . . . .	Harry Garland
Song, "N' Everthing" . . . . .	Irving Scott
A Great Hero of the Past . . . . .	J. J. Barbaro
Song, "Wake Up, Napoleon" . . . . .	Pat Barnes and Soldiers
Finale . . . . .	Entire Company
. . . . .	* . . . . *

## Chorus:

John Wilkowaski, Will Levitz, Floyd Hausman, Jack Carney, Edwin Harmon, Leo Isaac, William Arnold, Rolland Stagemeyer, Martin Morissey, Milo Sorishek, Frank Hart, Max Herman, Cecil Kaufman, Edwin Korijski, Herbert Funke, Bob Caine

## Chorus Girls:

Julius Esmial, Joe Donoghue, Peter Doran, Pat O'Sullivan, Fred McManus, Joe Higgins, Russell Berridgo, Carl Schroeder

The buck private of the army became a hero at least for a night. For once he stood upon a pedestal and shone in all his glory. Beneath all the banter and rail-lery and nonsense, there ran an undertone of disguised seriousness clamoring for recognition of the plain soldier who worked as hard and sacrificed as much as any other in the army. The play had grown out of the very soil of our camp, and the enthusiastic applause accorded both play and players on the part of the officers and men alike constituted the best reward for their efforts.

"A Buck on Leave" was destined to become one of the most famous soldier-shows developed in the A. E. F. It met with instantaneous success. During the winter it traveled to Tours, Bourges, Bordeaux, Paris, Brest, Nevers, Savenay, Mars-sur-Allier, Paulliac, and the U. S. S. Bridgeport. In each place it ran from one to three weeks. All in all about one million dough-boys witnessed "A Buck on Leave."

For our own camp the show did a great service, inasmuch as it gave an explosive outlet to the pent-up feelings of the men in the high-tension days preceding the Armistice. Nerves were taut and exceedingly strained.

The American army had launched the terrific battle of the Meuse-Argonne during September and October, in which a fighting force of nearly a million men was engaged in the fiercest struggle of the World War, intent on bringing it to a close before winter would compel the cessation of military operations.







Some of the Officer Personnel of the Park

(U. S. Signal Corps Photo.)

Every soldier in the A. E. F. was being taxed to the utmost limit of endurance. In the fighting areas, as well as in the base and intermediate zones, all the forces contributed the last ounce of energy to bring about the final decision. The hundreds of miles from the ports up to the front swarmed with activity in the great race against time. Day and night the truck trains thundered over the roads and roared through the camp up and back from the battle zone. Speed, speed, speed—that became the cry of the hour. The spirit of victory thrilled every department of the service, from the Argonne down to the coast.

Our shops were never idle. The men worked like demons. Hammers pounded, machines whirled, and motors throbbed in all corners of the Park. Cars and trucks limped in, were overhauled, and sped away again on their long journeys. Calls for motor parts were incessant, and hundreds of thousands left the depot to refit the vehicles disabled along the line. Freight trains with wrecked cars rolled into the yards, and hundreds of rehabilitated cars, trucks, and motorcycles were sent out to fulfill their mission of war. The war had reached its highest peak, and the end seemed in sight. The Reconstruction Park at Verneuil also had its share in this glorious achievement.

Day after day, as we glanced at the large war map, we could note the forward movement of our troops along the Meuse and through the Argonne section. Day after day the war bulletins carried the news of the further advances toward the vital Carignan-

Mézières-Sedan railroad feeding the Cambrai-Rheims section of the German army. Day after day the elaborate defenses of this territory fell before the bitter onslaughts of these unseasoned but determined fighters of America, facing the best divisions of a well-drilled and veteran foe. The enemy could not stem the onrushing tide that threatened to engulf it in a gigantic debacle. Their line was breaking and their morale weakening.

The German High Command realized the seriousness of the attack and the precarious condition of its center and right wing on the western front, and ordered a general retreat. Slowly, gradually, stubbornly resisting, the imperial army fell back into Belgium, the English and French forces in pursuit, capturing entire divisions and much valuable war material. Though the losses were heavy, the Germans effected an orderly and well-conducted retreat. Ludendorff hoped to be able to hold the American forces long enough to bring about a complete retreat between Metz and the Holland border; and then, perhaps, winter would set in, giving his wornout troops a respite and his armies a chance to reorganize, while the Allies suspended operations till spring. But that was precisely what Foch and the Allied commanders did not intend to let him do.

By a series of swift massed attacks, Pershing threw his divisions at the crumbling German line, forcing it back farther and farther toward the Carignan-Sedan rail artery. By the fourth of November our troops



had reached the town of La Neuville, opposite Stenay, while the Third Corps crossed to the east side of the Meuse River, captured the Dun-sur-Meuse heights, and in two days drove the foe out into the marshy lowlands of the Woevre.

The enemy faced defeat.

And then, on the sixth of November was flashed the breath-taking news to the dazed nations that the German Government had appealed to the Allies for a conference with the view of arranging an armistice.

The world went wild with joy. The war was over!

## CHAPTER XI

### THE DAY OF FATE

The war was over. And still went on.

The plenipotentiaries of Germany, under the leadership of Erzberger, had been escorted through the lines and were in conference with Marshal Foch. But a conference does not necessarily lead to a cessation of hostilities. The ambassadors might consider the conditions too crushing, too humiliating for their national honor, and refuse to sign. Then, too, it might be but a gesture, a ruse of war, to gain time for a gathering of greater forces and for maneuvering into more advantageous positions.

We over there, involved so deeply in military activities and pushed so closely to the actual seat of war, had not the wider and more distant perspective which would have enabled us to judge conditions in their true values. It seemed well-nigh impossible to us that the powerful German war machine, so perilously near victory in July, could in so short a time have become bled of its strength so as to cause its defeat. It was a thing for which we hoped, but which we scarcely dared to expect.

We could not understand the frenzy of hysterical gladness that swept the States upon receipt of the

news that an appeal had been made for an armistice. Appeals are not signatures. Our feelings in these days were a curious mixture of high hope, uncertainty, anxiety, enthusiasm, doubt, fear.

Never, since the dawn of creation, had the world lived through such hectic days of excitement and suspense. Events of tremendous importance followed each other with such rapidity of movement, that the minds of men stood dazed and almost failed to register the magnitude of their potential effect upon the destiny of entire nations and races. Crises precipitated crises. Climaxes brought climaxes.

The war continued. General Haig had broken the lines of defense, and pressed with all might toward Mons and Maubeuge; he pushed his way through the gap between the Scheldt and the Sambre, turning the entire line to the north and the south. The German right wing was in extreme danger of being pinched off between the sea and the Dutch border before it could squeeze through in its retreat. While Haig drove straight east, Pershing pounded his way directly north. It was the continued onward march of the American forces that placed the Kaiser's army in the most critical position in which it ever found itself since the beginning of the war. Haig's drive from the west toward Namur and Liège, and Pershing's plunge in the direction of the Mézières-Sedan railroad, converging from the south toward the same strategical point, threatened the entire right and center of the enemy with envelopment and disaster. Pershing



brushed aside the last defenses of the Kriemhilde Stellung, and launched the massed forces of his divisions toward Sedan and Montmedy. The moment they actually occupied the heights of Sedan and cut the Metz-Mézières artery, the door for the retreat of the German center closed, and it faced almost certain annihilation. The entire western front was doomed.

The new American army, despised so contemptuously by the German military leaders, proved to be the little stone rolling down the mountain side, gathering volume and momentum, that struck the clay feet of the Teuton Colossus and sent it crashing to the earth.

The fall of the supposedly impregnable German defense lines in these agitated days—the Freya Stellung, the Brunhilde Stellung, the Siegfried Stellung, the Kriemhilde Stellung, the Hermann Stellung, the Wotan Stellung—sounded like the passing of the old Teutonic gods in the ruins of a dying world amid the groans of the thundering guns! An entire civilization seemed to crumble with these names into dust. It was a modern *Weltuntergang*, a *Götterdämmerung*.

Chaos reigned. Austria-Hungary had ceased to exist. Turkey laid down its arms. Bulgaria surrendered. Thrones crashed; dynasties fell; nations collapsed. The rumblings of revolution and anarchy echoed over the German frontier, ominous, sinister, murderous. The Kaiser fled.

Then came the eleventh of November.

The eleventh dawned a beautiful day. The air was

mild and the sky full of sunshine. Everybody seemed to know that the war would end that morning; but no one could state where the report came from. Rumors were flying thick and fast. The old tension seemed broken, and all faces were smilingly happy. Wherever I went, I was greeted with remarks that bespoke the general spirit of joy.

"Morning, Padre. Heard the great news, I suppose?"

"The Big Show will come to an end today. Soon they'll be ringing down the curtain on the last act."

"Won't the boys up there be surprised, though, when the racket stops so suddenly? They'll be lost, it'll be so quiet."

"Say, Father, is it true that the Germans signed?"

"Do you think we'll be able to go home soon?"

"I heard they stopped fighting already. Is that true?"

"When will the Germans sign, Father? I heard, this noon. Do you know anything about it?"

"How would you like to be at the front this morning."

"Hurrah! I just heard the war is over! I'm going to get tanked today!"

Such and similar things I could hear from everyone I met. It was a wild mass of conjecture; but everyone appeared to know that hostilities would cease sometime that day.

A little after eight o'clock in the morning I went to the camp hospital to make my daily round of visits.

The boys were as happy as their illness allowed. German prisoners were among the patients. They alone were silent, and their faces bore an expression of mute dejection. Gloom and sorrow looked out of their eyes. One of them asked me:

"Is it true that the Kaiser has fled to Holland?"

"Yes."

"Feigling!—Coward!"

He turned over on his side and buried his face in the pillows. That the Kaiser fled in the hour of the country's defeat, seemed to cut into the souls of these men more than the loss of the war.

As I was going along, one of the wardmen stepped into the room. Seeing me, he came over. "Father, I suppose you've heard?"

"About the war?" I answered laughingly. "Sure. Everybody is talking about it."

"No, I don't mean that. One of the boys, a guard-house prisoner, was shot a short while ago."

"Killed?"

"I don't think so. They're bringing him in on a stretcher now, right over the hill above the camp."

I hurried out and walked rapidly up the hill. On stepping into the woods I saw the Sergeant of the Guard standing there, dressed in undershirt, trousers, and socks; and he wore his side arms. His face was set in grim lines, but it looked pale and sad.

"What happened, Sergeant?"

"Oh, I had to use my gat on a camp prisoner. The



big fool bolted and tried to escape while marching with a bunch of other prisoners under guard, going out to work. He had just left the guardhouse and, seeing the other fellows between himself and the guard, made a break for the woods. The guard called to him to halt, but he went right on. When the guard called for me, I was in my tent, about to get some sleep. I slipped into my pants, strapped on my gun and gave chase. The prisoner scooted down the hill, over the creek, and I after him. I halted him three times, but he kept on. I shot into the air twice; he wouldn't stop, so I had to shoot at him, and clipped his hand. When he stopped to look at it, I shouted at him: 'Why don't you stop when I halt you? That's what you get for it, you big boob.' He gave me one look and ran for all he was worth. I didn't run, but raised my gat and let him have it. He dropped."

"Dead?"

"Not when I saw him. But he is hit in the back. Gee, Chaplain, it's hell when you have to shoot your own soldiers!" There were tears in his eyes. His face twitched painfully. He gulped hard and looked down on the ground.

I said nothing, but inwardly I wished he had let him run, or, at least, had not shot the man. Later on he might have come back. However, wishes would not help matters any now. My duty called me ahead, and so I went on. When I met the stretcher bearers, the soldier lay there quietly, eyes open, perfectly con-

scious. Apparently he did not suffer much pain; or, if he did, he concealed it well. I spoke to one of the men in a whisper.

"Bad?"

"Right through the back."

They carried him gently down to the hospital and laid him on a table. The doctors opened up his clothing, and there, on the right side of his abdomen, I saw a tiny slit, with just a few drops of blood around the edge. The bullet had pierced him through and through. The man suffered intense pain, but he neither winced nor moaned. I spoke to him.

"Are you a Catholic, buddy?"

"No,—sir."

"Shall I call the other chaplain?"

"No, I don't want a chaplain."

He was sullen, and arguing would be useless. If he refused to ask for one, that did not mean that I could not send for one. I drew the doctor aside after awhile.

"Will he live, Doc?"

"Hardly. He has to be operated upon to see what damage has resulted inside, and since we have little operating facilities here, we'll take an ambulance and ship him over to Mars-sur-Allier hospital."

"I have to go to Nevers this morning, Doctor, and the car is waiting for me. Will you send someone for the Protestant chaplain?"

"All right, Father."

After finishing my hospital visits I hurried to the

car, and off we went toward Nevers. An officer and a sergeant occupied the car with me. The sergeant, Louis Bapst, had been one of my former philosophy students at college. About two weeks before, I had met him accidentally in Nevers, a joyful surprise for both professor and student. He belonged to the Intelligence Section of the 47th Infantry and had been severely gassed at the Meuse. As a patient of the convalescent hospital at Mesves, he had received permission to pay me a visit and had been with me for two days.

The trip to Nevers was delightful. Not a cloud darkened the deep crystal blue of the heavens. The sun cast a flood of soft rich light over the brown fields and turned the autumn haze along the horizon into a blue-gold veil of the most delicate texture. The trees with their stark limbs and twigs stood out in bold relief against the clear sky, like filigree patterns of exquisite art and workmanship. The pungent fragrance of dank leaves mixed with the earthy odor of the newly plowed soil. The world seemed to smile in sympathy with our joyful expectancy of the end of the war.

And still, though moving through everchanging scenes of beauty, the journey brought me no unalloyed pleasure. Again and again the picture of that wounded camp prisoner rose up before my view and haunted my memory. The whole thing appeared so pitifully futile. Trying to escape, only to be shot! And that on Armistice Day, with the war practically over! Soon



to go home, and now to be laid in a grave! It made this little tragedy doubly sad and poignant. What a mystery is human life! I could not conquer the sadness of these thoughts until we reached Nevers.

Nevers bubbled with excitement. Will there be an armistice? The French people gathered in small groups, talking with animation and gesticulating wildly. Their faces were serious, tense, furrowed. The misery of four long years of desperate, heart-breaking fighting seemed finally to be crowned with victory. The atmosphere was pregnant with agonizing hope. Every moment the groaning of the guns must change into the sweet melodious strain of heavenly peace.

While the French were serious in their waiting, the American soldiers were frankly happy. Pain had not cut into their hearts so deeply; sorrow had not robbed their homes. To them the armistice would be but the relief from a great suspense. Their faces were smiling. And everywhere we went, the same unanswered question was flung back and forth: "Any news? Did the Germans sign? Is the war over?"

I called on Major Stull, the Senior Chaplain, and then Sergeant Bapst and I went to the Hotel de la Paix for dinner. "De la Paix! Peace!" I wondered: *nomen—omen?*

During the meal everyone talked peace, but no one seemed to know. After dinner the sergeant and I separated: he, to go back to Mesves; and I, to wait for definite news. Time dragged cruelly in these soul-tearing hours of hope and expectation.

At about two o'clock I sauntered leisurely over to the convent of St. Gildart, the motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity. There in the convent garden stood the tomb of Sister Marie-Bernard, little Bernadette Soubirous, the favored child of our Lady of Lourdes. In the center of the garden, on the crest of the hill, midst beautifully patterned flower beds, a little gothic chapel rose in dainty prettiness above her grave. I entered. Silence surrounded me, and the peace of heaven. In the presence of the Saint I was totally oblivious of the city, the war, and the world, sunk in contemplation between the narrow walls of this haven of sanctified solitude.

I felt strangely composed. Beneath this pavement, beneath my very feet, rested the body of one of the chosen souls of God. Her eyes had beamed to the vision of Mary Immaculate; her ears had thrilled to the melody of her voice; her heart had leaped to the rapture of her love and affection. Forever after, as long as she breathed, the earth could hold no charm and the world no pleasure, for she had gazed through the veil into the golden fields of the Great Beyond. Life must have been but a lingering death, and death to her a welcomed friend. Time meant nothing; eternity all. Eternity meant repose, bliss, light, love. Everlasting peace.

Suddenly I was shocked into attention. A terrific noise rent the silence of the tomb. I rushed outside. Down in the valley at the foot of the hill, hardly two blocks away, lay the railroad yards. About fifty

American locomotives were stationed there. Fifty jets of steam shot into the air like spurting geysers, and fifty engine whistles shrieked their message of joy up to the skies!

The Armistice had been signed! Peace!

Somewhere over the hills cannons barked, sharp and stabbing, the echoes rolling like cataracts of thunder! The noise was deafening, ear-splitting. And through all the torrent of sound, church bells pealed: high, tremulous, silvery, the little ones jingled and jangled; deep, loud, sonorous, the large ones boomed and roared. The music of victory, the symphony of peace!

I heard voices. Turning around, I saw the good Sisters come hurriedly into the garden. Decades of staid religious decorum relaxed for the moment. They clapped their hands, hopped up and down, laughed and screamed and talked, fell into each others' arms, hugged and kissed one another! They shouted:

"Finie la guerre! Finie la guerre!"

Then, as if some unseen spirit had touched them, first one, then another, then all became strangely hushed. Fingers locked into fingers over their bosom, and their lips moved in a silent prayer.

I left. Walking along the streets I became aware of a peculiar clattering sound in back of me. A troop of cavalry must be trotting down the pavement; so I quickly stepped to the edge of the street and looked. It was but a crowd of children in wooden-soled shoes scampering over the cobblestones on their way home



from school! Their tiny voices shrilled in a din of talk and screams, piercing the air like thin swift arrows.

"Victoire! Victoire! Victoire!"

Well might they rejoice, these boys and girls of France. So many of their fathers and brothers had gone through the war, now so happily ended. I followed in the wake of their galloping footsteps.

On reaching the heart of the town, a magnificent sight greeted my eyes. The sleepy little place was transformed, boiling with a surging mass of humanity. People left their homes, the shops, the stores, the factories, and swarmed out into the streets. No one had any particular destination. They simply went wherever the swirling currents of the milling crowds chanced to carry them.

The tumult was indescribable. Everybody yelled, screamed, laughed, sang, and danced. Groups shouted greetings in passing, slapping each other on the back, grasped arms and swung around in circles. Fathers and mothers and friends embraced and kissed each other in the streets, laughing and crying in the same breath, tears of happiness streaming down their faces. A frenzy of glee, a madness of joy seized young and old.

Amid all the hubbub that swept in a deluge of sound through the narrow streets, one could hear voices shout over and over the rhapsodic phrases: "Finie la guerre!" "Victoire et gloire!"

As if by magic, the houses and stores became decorated with bunting of red, white, and blue; garlands hung in festoons across the streets; French and Amer-

ican flags (scarcely any others) were draped from windows and staffs. Every time a new flag appeared somewhere, the masses in the streets below would throw their hands into the air, wave their hats and cry: "Vive la France! Vive l'Amérique!"

Groups of French and American soldiers came arm in arm down the streets, running, jumping, singing, laughing, swaying to and fro. Here and there, encountering some French maidens, the soldiers would encircle them in a ring, whoop up a war dance, cut funny capers, scare them half to death with a blood-curdling yell, and then dash laughingly on again into the crowds.

The Place Carnot was a seething caldron. Into it the main streets poured their streams of thousands of happy persons, mingling them in a confusing swirl of counter-currents, till they worked their way through the square to another side and were sluiced back again into the city along the less congested thoroughfares, only to return a little later in the evercircling flow of feet.

At the height of all this revelry, a horrid racket smote the ear. At first faint, then louder, it finally burst upon the square in full force. Upon hearing the news of the armistice, the 19th Engineers marched from their camp into town. They had not even taken time to wash up, but dropped their work and proceeded without further delay to capture Nevers by storm.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, the hob-nailed shoes

pounded the pavement. Coming down the Rue de Commerce they now reached the Place Carnot. Everybody pressed aside to let them pass. What a sight! Uniforms and coveralls soaked with oil and soot; hands smeared with grease; faces streaked with grime. In serried ranks they paraded along, four abreast, holding tins, cans, pans, piping, sheet metal, iron rods, tools—anything and everything that would create a noise. With leathery lungs they bellowed the song: "Hail! Hail! The gang's all here!" And all the while they accompanied it with the savage music of their cacophonous band.

The Frenchmen enjoyed it. Hands waved; handkerchiefs fluttered; cheer after cheer rose to the sky, as the Engineers poured into the square.

"Vive les Américains! Vive les Américains!"

One lad with a megaphone voice would not be outdone by French courtesy and kept on shouting back to the crowds: "Vive yourself! Vive yourself!"

A tumult of screams, cheers, laughter, and every conceivable noise; a veritable orgy of riotous happiness. It seemed utterly beyond the power of human achievement to control this chaotic turmoil of joy-frenzied persons. However, it happened. Someone sang out in a clear, powerful voice: "Allons, enfants de la patrie . . ."

The Marseillaise! The effect was magical. It took a line or two before the song carried across the square. But then! All movement stopped. The shouting ceased; the laughter died, and hats went off. Bodies



erect and heads held high, that massed mob of people sang their national hymn, with a dash and a verve and a flair that sent the notes along in wave on wave of raptured melody. It was absolutely thrilling, electric, magnificent, terrific. The spontaneous outburst of a nation's soul. The gigantic cry of a people's spirit.

When the last note had died away, for a moment there reigned a hushed silence. Then a tremendous shout rent the air: "Vive la France! Vive l'Amérique!"

Now a sudden impulse gripped the multitude, as if in obedience to some irresistibly urging law. That confused tangle of surging crowds unraveled itself, formed into impromptu parades, and marched in long processions through the various streets, singing the Marseillaise, the Madelon, and other songs in an uninterrupted, ceaseless, interminable flow that lasted into the night.

To have witnessed this expression of elemental emotion, in all its dynamic simplicity, was an experience that rocked one's soul to its uttermost depths by the sheer force and might of spectacular grandeur.

Thus passed the Day of Fate. And the war *was* over.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE AFTERMATH

Peace!

It produced a radical change in the spirit of the men, and their whole bearing revealed it. The drawn, worried, careworn expression of suspense, so noticeable in the weeks before the Armistice, had disappeared from their features. The joy of victory lit up their faces and beamed in their eyes. Smiles and words of cheer came spontaneously to their lips. They laughed and whistled and sang more frequently now. Their nervousness had vanished.

In the happiness that the war had been terminated and the victory won, they were eager to lay down their tools, pack their barrack bags, and sail for home. The great incentive, the winning of the war, no longer spurred them on. The high-tension voltage dropped perceptibly; they were badly homesick; and as a natural result an inclination arose among the men to relax in every line of military work and military life. This attitude held a serious danger. A spirit of discontent might gradually develop that would jeopardize the discipline of the whole organization.

Accordingly, all officers and men of the camp were assembled in the Y theater on the evening of the nine-

teenth of November, a week after the Armistice. Colonel Hegeman was to address them on the subject of work to be done and the prospects of going home. I had been asked to give a speech on the necessity of discipline and morale in the trying days of the post-armistice period.

After a musical number rendered by the orchestra, the Colonel mounted the stage, and in clear-cut, incisive words informed the men that there could be no thought of going home in the near future. Even if a quarter of a million soldiers were returned every thirty days, it would consume months to bring them all back to the States. As long as they remained and needed supplies and subsistence, the Motor Transport Corps would have to function, and tens of thousands of motor vehicles would travel over the roads of France for quite some time to come.

And up in the battle areas the wrecks of trucks, automobiles, and motorcycles were strewn far and wide; these, too, had to be hauled down to our Park and repaired and salvaged. But this work accomplished, the Colonel promised to do his utmost to have them returned as soon as possible.

After the applause had died down, the orchestra played another piece, and my turn came to speak. I sketched the origin and genesis of the war and dwelt on the part our fighting forces played in winning the victory. Then I closed my speech with the following appeal:

“And you, you lads of the Wheeled Forces, of the



Motor Transport Corps, have you done your bit? Done your bit! To win this war our soldiers had to fight; and to fight they needed guns; and for their guns they needed ammunition; and to get ammunition they needed transport; and for transport they needed the M. T. C.; and the M. T. C. needed Verneuil; and Verneuil—that is you! You did your bit!

“Lads, you are heroes without a Croix de Guerre. And believe me, when you get back, the whole nation, your city, your town, your home, your father, mother, wife, sister, brother, sweetheart—they will stand there with the pride of victory in their tear-stained eyes and the smile of welcome on their lips, and press you to their hearts! Because you did the big thing, the heroic thing, the patriotic thing, and you helped win the Great War!

“This war should never have happened. It must be made impossible for a long time. But that needs guarantees; and we have no enemy government just now to treat with, no enemy government to see that the guarantees are furnished and complied with. I realize that you want to go home. I know that you want to plant your two good American feet on good American soil again and greet the Old Lady with the Lamp in her Hand, *tout de suite*. I appreciate, I understand it; it is natural, and speaks well of you; it would be bad, if it were otherwise.

“But we came over here to serve our country. When we left we didn’t ask how long. We went to serve her as long as she needed us. She needed us then,

and she needs us now. We served her during the war, and we will serve her after the war. You were no slackers during the war. Will you be slackers now? As long as that red, white, and blue waves over the nation and over you and me, it shall not be! A peace slacker? Not as long as the stars shine in the sky, not as long as there is a God above! No: you never were slackers before; you must not and shall not be now! Let's not be less brave than the doughboys. They have to put up with more than we. Then carry your peace burden in peace! Keep at your work, and work as long as it is needed. Do whatever is required of you, in order to make the victory of our country complete. Stand fast and firm!

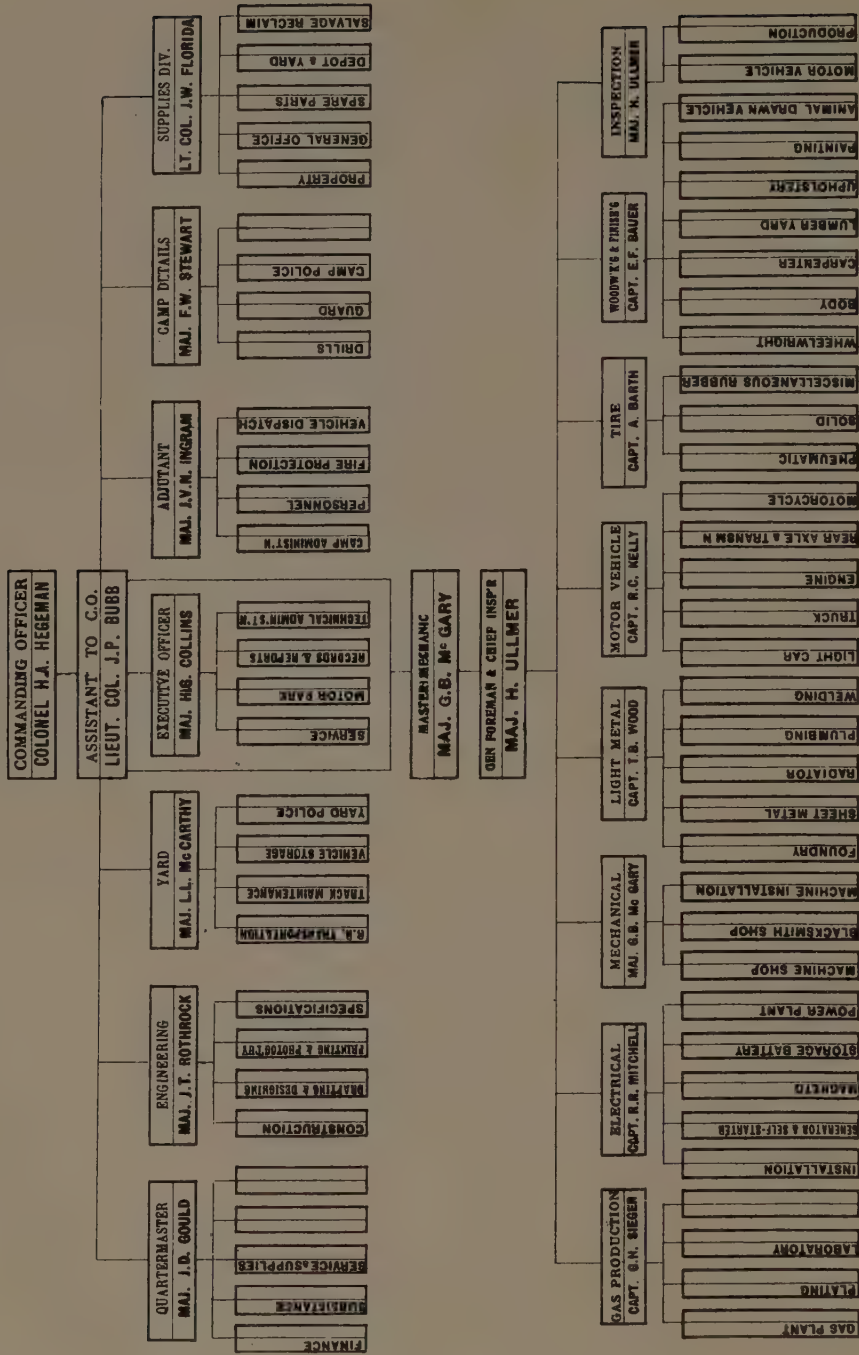
"Men, let that be your motto: Stand fast and firm! Don't let down the bars, and watch your step now in France. Be on your guard, for the eyes of France and of the world are upon you. Don't disgrace yourself. To disgrace yourself means to disgrace the flag, the United States, your family, your wife, your sweetheart, your glorious record.

"Men, lads, comrades! In this critical and trying time of waiting to go home, remember this and impress it upon your mind and heart: no matter how long we still have to wait, 'Stand fast and firm.' "

Waiting might be irksome, but I felt they would not be found wanting in the fulfillment of their higher duty. Our hopes were not deceived. The men lived up to our expectations. A spirit of willingness and cooperation prevailed in every department of the camp,







Organization Chart

and showed conclusively that the men had grasped the idea of the Colonel and were bent on bringing their mission to a successful close. The thought of finishing their assignment and then going home filled them with new vigor and new energy. Unabated the work continued.

Little by little, the battle areas were cleared of the motor wreckage. From all quarters of France the salvage was collected and routed down to our Park. In long lines, the trains pulled into the yards, deposited their battered freight, left, and returned again to bring another shipment. The yards were littered with the wastage of war.

Our men labored from morning until night, and the shops became a huge beehive of industry. The rehabilitation work of our men on these bullet-pierced, shell-riven, crashed and smashed derelicts of motor vehicles was astonishingly varied and complete.

War is waste; but here we had reconstruction, reclamation, rebirth. Here the soldiers labored to rebuild the damage and injury done by the brutal forces of man's ingenuity to destroy. Upon me this activity of the plant always exerted a powerful fascination. It seemed like a song, this work of salvage, a song of war and peace.

#### THE SONG OF SALVAGE

*"The salvage train!"*

How slowly through the littered yard  
It moves, as if in pain,  
This ambulance of giant bodies, marred  
And battered, bruised and scarred

With wounds of war!  
Not long before  
Each one went pounding down the road of death;  
And now their breath  
Is still.

*"The crane! Hoist with a will!"*

Now softly, gently! Place this mangled truck  
Upon the ground.  
When cannons roared their thunder all around  
And shells went screaming, whining through the air  
And struck,  
And forests bent their heads to kiss the mud  
All red with heroes' blood—  
Ah, it was there  
This giant beast of strength,  
This behemoth of war,  
Charged down the weary length  
Of way that led but to the door  
Of hell;  
Then staggered, crumpled, fell!  
The deadly shell  
Had found its mark.  
Out through the dark  
Of darkest night  
The blight  
Had come  
And struck it dumb  
And made it stop!

*"Into the shop!"*

Good. Lift its shattered form  
And leave it rest.  
Now take its heart, this steel-framed heart once warm  
Within its panting breast,  
Whose throb was one grand song  
Of life—  
This heart that beat so loud and strong  
And snorted in its ire  
With spurts of flaming fire,



And lunged  
And plunged  
Into the raging strife—  
Oh, take this heart of steel  
And nurse it; make it feel  
The gentle touch of knowing hands,  
The tender care that understands  
The battle's pain and smart!  
Bind all its wounds of war  
And make its heart  
Beat mightily once more!—

*"All finished! Off again!"*

Just so.

Lo!

The strength! The speed!  
The might of this flame-hearted steed!  
It spurns the earth  
In one great train  
Of dust!  
The offspring of a strange rebirth,  
Through all the countries far and wide  
It dashes forth, forever to increase  
Its stride!  
No more 'twill battle with the lust  
Of brutal power:  
It is a messenger divine  
To haste the hour  
For Freedom's light to shine  
In Peace, in Peace!

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The spirit of peace hovered like a blessing over the camp; it poured its happiness into every heart. Even the lads in the guardhouse felt its benign influence.

One lad there, however, found no solace in the thought of peace; for him the future held no sunshine. The view before him was dreary, dismal, gloomy. No

cheerful welcome, when he returned—nothing but high, gray, sentinelled walls, and prison bars. He had been a deserter.

One day toward the end of November, while going to the hospital, I met the sergeant in charge of the camp prisoners.

“Good day, Chaplain. If you don’t mind, sir, I wish you would see and talk to one of the men in the guard-house.”

“Who is he?”

“You have heard of Private X., I suppose? The one who deserted? Well, sir, his sentence came down from the Reviewing Board, O. K.’d.”

“What did he get?”

“Ten years.”

“Ten years?”

“Yes, sir, and ever since X. heard his sentence, he’s been brooding, and to me it seems that he’s up to some mischief; but I can’t figure out just what. He’s desperate, that much I can see, so I thought it might be good if you would go and talk to him.”

“I’ll do that, Sergeant, as soon as I have made my rounds through the hospital.”

I went to the hospital. “Ten years—ten years!” The words drummed through my brain. No wonder the lad was desperate. And for desertion! I knew it had happened sometime in the summer; but the particulars of the case were unknown to me. “Up to some mischief,” the sergeant thought. Could I hope that the man would tell me? We would see.

After finishing my hospital work, I went to the guardhouse. Half a dozen prisoners were there, sitting on the bunks in a far corner. I walked to the center and called out:

"Private X.! Is Private X. here?"

"Yiou!"

"Come over here for a second, X."

He slid down from the bunk and slouched over to where I stood. He was a medium-size lad, about twenty-three, well built, with an intelligent face and bright eyes; not at all what I had expected a deserter to look like. He eyed me cautiously.

"Come, X., let's go down here to the other end, where we'll not be disturbed."

We walked to the end of the room and sat down on the edge of a bunk. I remained silent for a little while. He sat there, shuffling his feet slowly back and forth, eyes riveted to the ground, waiting for me to begin.

"How do you feel, X.?"

"Oh, all right."

"No, you don't feel all right, X. You're just saying that. You know better; and so do I. You're feeling rotten; but you don't like to admit it, that's all. Right?"

He did not answer. He was on his guard, evidently sizing up this unexpected situation. Finally he spoke, in a low tone, reluctantly:

"Yes, sir—Father, I mean."

Oho, one of *my* lads! That little correction of



speech gave me confidence. It showed that he still retained his respect for "the cloth."

"The sentence came through from the Board of Review?"

"Yes—Father."

"What did they give you?"

His face grew hard as stone; his eyes pinched together; his jaws contracted; his lips bent into a line of scorn. Then, with a grunt that summed up all the bitterness of his soul, he snapped out: "Ten years!"

"Ten years," I echoed. "What in the world, buddy, did you do to get such a stiff sentence?"

"Desertion. That's what they called it; but I can't see it."

"You can't see it. When I look at you, I can't see it either. Tell me how it happened; I don't know the first thing about it."

His face softened. He slumped forward, his cheek resting in his hand, his elbow on his knee. After some time he began:

"Well, Father, here's the thing. This spring and summer, when the Germans made their big offensive, they were bound to break through and win before our armies could get over here. And the Fritzies darn near did. They had everybody jumping. The line almost went to pieces. A little more and we would have been licked. All of us here knew it, and we were leery. We came over here to win this blasted war, not to lose it. And we weren't going to lose it, if we could help it.

"Well, some of us boys got to talking this thing

over. We couldn't see what good it did to tinker around automobiles and monkey around with tools. That wouldn't hold the Germans back and win the war. Fighting alone could. They didn't have enough men up there to fight, that was the whole trouble. Things got worse and worse, so a bunch of us fellows got together and planned to beat it up to the front to fight. One night we left. Part of the way we bummed rides and part of the way we hiked, but we soon lost each other. I kept on going up.

"I never thought about a rifle and a gas mask and a pack. Somewhere close to the front an M.P. stopped and questioned me. He wasn't satisfied with my answers and took me to the headquarters of some outfit. Here the officers quizzed me, and it didn't take them long to find out that I was trying to bluff my way into the lines. I finally had to admit that I didn't belong to a fighting outfit. I pleaded and begged to have a rifle and go up to the front; but they told me I wasn't trained and I'd only be in the way. I saw it would be no use and gave up, telling them I belonged down here to the Park at Verneuil. They held me there until a guard came up from here to take me back. Down here they court-martialed me. Desertion! Ten years!"

Again that bitterness of soul swept over his face. I had watched the lad intently, while he told me his story, and was convinced of the truth of his words. He ran away—to fight! He deserted—to the lines! Why, this couldn't be the meaning of desertion! Desertion, to my mind, bespoke the very opposite of his

action. This lad appeared to me a hero, not a deserter. He deserved a medal, not a prison sentence. And still—he had left his own organization in time of war.

“How about the other lads who left with you?”

“They either came back or were picked up and sent back. They got a couple of months in the old jug.”

“A couple of months only! And you got ten years! Why the difference?”

“Well, they were charged with desertion, but all the court could prove was that they were A. W. O. L. (absent without leave). But I did a foolish thing. While on my way I wrote to a lieutenant here in camp, a friend of mine, and told him I was going to fight in the lines and didn’t intend to come back. That’s what broke my neck. When my case came up, they yanked him into court as a witness against me. You see, he had talked to others about my letter. By that they proved that I had left the outfit with the intention of not returning.”

“I see now. Desertion in a technical, military sense. That surely is tough, my lad. Particularly, when you went up to fight.”

“That’s just it, Father. If I had been up at the lines and ran away from the danger, then I could understand this whole business. But this way! Why, I wanted to fight; to help win the war; to die, if necessary. And then they give me ten years! First Gievres; and then, perhaps, Atlanta Federal Prison. Ten years!”

The American military prison in France was situ-



ated near Gievres. Every convicted soldier, receiving a sentence of six months or more, served his time there.

"When are you going to Gievres, X.?"

"I? I'm not going to Gievres."

"What do you mean, not going to Gievres?"

"I'm not going, that's all."

"How so?"

He paused. A deep scowl disfigured his face; hard again as stone—grim, stern, determined.

"Because I'm going to *bolt*, see? I'm going to run away from the guard one of these days and make him *shoot me*! Get that? I'll make him *shoot me*! And I'll make him shoot to *kill*!"

"Why, X., you're crazy! That's plain suicide!"

"What do I care!"

"You'll damn your soul!"

"I think it's damned already; so what's the difference!"

"Now, listen, X."

"Father, there's no use talking. My mind is made up, and that's settled. You remember the prisoner on Armistice Day? Well, that's me! He died from the shot, and I'll do the same. They can bury me in any old hole, for all I care. But they'll not get me to Gievres!"

So now I knew where he had obtained his idea and his plan, from that unfortunate lad whom the sergeant had shot on Armistice Day. A deep pity seized me. He was indeed desperate; so desperate, in fact, that it

clouded his mind to all arguments of reason and faith. One thought alone, I felt, might be able to pierce the armor of his resolve.

"X., are your folks living?"

He looked up in surprise. "Yes, Father."

"Do they know of all this?"

"No, they don't and they never will. That's just why I'm doing it."

"How do you figure that?"

"They'll think I had been killed in battle."

"No, they won't, X. The war is over, and soldiers are no longer killed in battle. They may get a telegram which runs something like this: 'Private X., your son, a guardhouse prisoner, was killed while attempting to escape from his guard.' They'll want to know what it's all about, and write; and then they'll get the whole story. Can't you see that? You can't keep it from them, no matter what you do. So you may just as well face the music."

"No, no! I can't, Father, I simply can't! Ten years in prison! I'll let myself be killed; that'll end it all!"

"But, X., you'll never serve ten years."

"Why not?"

"Listen. We won the war. That makes a world of difference. If you had committed some real crime, like murder, they would compel you to go through the whole stretch. But for a military offense—no! They'll investigate every single case. And if they see that you deserted your outfit in order to go to the front, why,

man, you'll be pardoned as sure as you are sitting here. I'll guarantee you, X., that you won't serve two years of this sentence, and if you behave yourself, you'll be out again in a year and a half or a year. There!"

"Father, it's no use. I can't face this disgrace. Good God—ten years! I'll get shot; then it's over."

"No, X., you'll not do it."

"Yes, I will."

"You will not."

"I will!"

"You can't!"

"Why not?"

"Because I know one who won't let you."

"Who?"

"Your—mother!"

"My —?"

His eyes opened wide and stared at me with a fixed, startled expression. He swallowed hard. I realized that I had pierced his armor. Now for the final thrust!

"Yes, X., your mother! You have a good Catholic mother. Heaven's alive! man, you talk about disgrace for yourself! Have you no regard, no respect, no love for your mother? Does it make no difference to you that you'll disgrace *her*? Do you want people to point their fingers at her and fling the taunt into her face that her son was a suicide? Do you want her to hide herself in shame, knowing that you, whom she loved, murdered his body and damned his soul? Do you



know what you would do, if you committed this cowardly act? I'll tell you: you'd *kill* your mother! She'd die of a broken heart!"

"Stop, Father! For God's sake, stop!"

He buried his face in his hands and swayed from side to side. I knew I appeared cruel in the way I cut into his soul; but cruelty here was mercy. So I went on:

"That's just what you would do—you'd kill your mother! Get yourself shot, eh? Sure, go ahead: and murder your mother, too! A fine son you are!"

The poor lad moaned in agony.

"Oh, X., don't do it—don't! Have pity on your mother! Don't break her heart! Don't bring her to an early grave! Come, X., do the right thing!"

I leaned over and put my arm across his shoulder.

"You wouldn't treat your mother that way, would you, X.?"

A groan of misery escaped him, and I felt his body tremble. The battle was nearly over. He rose unsteadily to his feet. I rose with him, grasped both his arms, turned him toward me, face to face, and looked into his eyes.

"For mother, X. Yes?"

His lips twitched convulsively, and two big tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Yes, Father." The words came slow, weak; almost in a whisper. "I'll go to Gievres."

"Attaboy, X. I knew you would—for your mother's sake. She'll understand; she has a mother's heart."

He straightened up, heaved a sigh, and wiped his eyes. Then, after a pause, he said calmly:

"Listen, Father. On the day I go, I want to go to confession and Communion. May I?"

"Absolutely, my boy. When do you leave for Gievres."

"Three days from today."

"Then I'll be here at seven. So it's all settled?"

"Yes, Father. You needn't worry. I'll go. I won't go back on my word."

Three days later I heard X.'s confession and gave him Holy Communion, to strengthen him on his way of bitterness and pain. As I was about to leave, he rose from his knees. I grasped his hand in both of mine.

"God bless you, X.! Stick it out!"

"I will, Father."

He knelt down again, and I went out. My heart was heavy with grief, and yet, full of joy, too. I never expected to see him again; but I did, months later, the day we landed at Hoboken.

I stood in the yard near the dock, watching the crowd that pressed up to the iron fence that separated us from the street. In back of me a company of soldiers was lined up, and a sergeant held roll call. Absorbed in the excitement of the crowd in front of me, I paid little attention to the names that were being called off.

Suddenly I heard the sergeant call out: "Private X.!"

"Yiou!"

I wheeled around, facing the line of soldiers. Slowly I looked down that line, from one to the other. There was X.! A happy smile spread over his features. He raised his hand in recognition. The roll call over, he walked up to me with a big, swinging stride.

"Hello, Father!"

"X.! Well, I'll be shot! Back again to the outfit? And no prisoner?"

"Yes, Father. Back—and no prisoner! Completely reinstated. Citizenship and all."

"What happened?"

"Pardoned. Just as you said. And the beauty of it is that the folks don't know that I ever was sentenced. I didn't tell them that Gievres was a prison. And here I'm coming right back with the outfit. Could anything be sweeter?"

"Gee, X., do you know: I'm downright happy!"

"So am I, Father. And I owe it to you. You don't imagine how thankful I am for what you did to me that day in the guardhouse."

"I'm glad I helped you."

"I'll have to go back to my company now, Father. See you later."

He waved his hand and ran back. But we never saw each other again. That day I was as happy as could be. I had saved a soldier's life. And, perhaps, his soul.



## CHAPTER XIII

### IN A BLAZE OF GLORY

Paris was all aflutter. Wilson was coming!

Streams of visitors poured into the city, until the metropolis was flooded. Hotel rooms sold at a premium and were finally unavailable. When I arrived in Paris on the night of the tenth of December, I taxied to the Hotel Tibre, quite confident that a recommendation from one of our officers would secure me a room. But the maître d'hôtel expressed his regret and affirmed with a bland smile and an eloquent shrug of the shoulders that all accommodations were reserved long in advance. He absolutely knew of no other hotel that still had a room or a cot.

Slowly, reluctantly, I walked away from the desk. At the main entrance I paused, gazing out into the street and into the night. Whither now? An officer was leaning lazily against the doorpost.

"Get a room, Chaplain?"

"No. Rotten business, this!"

"Try the Richmond already?"

"What's the Richmond?"

"The Y.M.C.A. American Officers' Hotel. They might have a bed."

"Nothing like trying. *Merci bien*, Lieutenant. Good-night."

The Richmond was near by. At the desk I inquired for a room.

"The only thing we have, Chaplain, is a room with two double beds. The one double is already taken. We can give you half of the other bed; but you must be satisfied to allow a stranger to sleep with you in the same bed."

"Anything, as long as I have a place to lay my head during my stay in Paris. I'll take it."

I took the key and went to my room. For the first time in two and a half months I would have the pleasure of sleeping in a real bed. And when I saw the box-springs, the fluffy mattress, white sheets, and feather pillows, I nearly screamed with joy! I would be an Epicurean of sleep that night and revel in luxurious ease! Promising myself a paradise of sweet dreams far into the sunny hours of the next morning, I retired early, with the rosiest expectations of a glorious rest.

But I was doomed to disappointment. Sleeping on an army cot had spoiled me. The mattress proved too soft, the springs too elastic, and the pillows too warm. A long time elapsed before I fell asleep; and when I finally did, my slumbers were broken and restless. Nightmarish dreams haunted my brain, and I woke up at all hours with fits and starts. A miserable night in a wonderful bed. Disgusting!

My coming to Paris could not be called exactly a

pleasure trip. I came on official business. The officers of the camp had collected eight hundred francs among themselves as a hospital fund with which to purchase creature comforts for the patients, and they made me the custodian and dispenser of this fund. With Christmas rapidly approaching, I considered it my duty to make the day as pleasant as possible for those poor lads confined to the narrow quarters of the hospital wards. This fund would be a godsend. The neighborhood around the camp offered nothing worth purchasing. Paris was the only logical place for this, and furthermore, I entertained hopes of receiving aid from the various American welfare organizations whose headquarters were situated in Paris. I would go beggar for my lads.

The morning after my arrival I went forth on my quest, visiting two of the main headquarters. They treated me cordially and courteously, but I received little encouragement and less satisfaction. If the Knights of Columbus acted in a similar fashion, my mission was ruined.

In the early afternoon I called at the K. of C., 16 Place de la Madeleine. On stating my wishes, they referred me to one of the secretaries, a Mr. Smith, I believe. He listened attentively to my plea, and when I had finished, he asked:

"How many men have you in the hospital?"

"About one hundred and fifty."

"And how many in the whole camp at Verneuil?"



"Close to five thousand."

"And you want supplies for these lads in the hospital?"

"Yes, if I can have that much."

"Well, Father, we don't like to do that."

I stiffened up. Was I to be politely refused again? I saw my last hopes go glimmering and began to feel warm in my neck and face. This time, though, I intended to speak out my mind, and that forcibly. So I asked coldly:

"And why not?"

"Here's the point: Why give something on Christmas Day to the men in the hospital only? Why not to the whole five thousand?"

"Oh!"

I relaxed and felt considerably easier. Having regained my composure, I said:

"Well, I thought I had an awful nerve asking something for one hundred and fifty. But, of course, if you K. of C. are willing to give the whole camp a Christmas treat, why certainly; the more the merrier!"

"Sure, Father, let them all have something. Their folks gave us this stuff for them; so why shouldn't they have it? In fact, we'll be willing to give you tons of supplies at various intervals for your boys, if you can only furnish the transportation. The trains so far have had an embargo on everything but war material, and trucks we cannot get in sufficient number."

"Belonging to the Motor Transport, I think we can solve the truck problem for our own camp. One of

our truck trains is up here at Paris right now, at the Overhaul Park, near Porte Villette. They sometimes travel light on the way back, so they may have room."

"Fine. Send us the truck, and we'll send you the supplies."

"In that case I think I'll go out to the Overhaul Park this very afternoon, in fact, immediately."

I took the Métropolitain, one of the two subways of Paris, and got out at Porte Villette. The Overhaul Park was supposed to be just outside the gate. I walked about, trying to locate it, but my search proved in vain. A boy, perhaps twelve years of age, came strolling along in my direction. Now a boy, I figured, would surely know where the American soldiers were, so I addressed him.

"Mon enfant, do you know where the American soldiers are around here?"

"Mais oui, monsieur."

"Will you take me there?"

"Certainement, monsieur."

I followed my little guide. It was after four o'clock, with the sun sinking rapidly. We walked along the grim, bastioned City Wall of Paris. When we had gone half a dozen blocks, I stopped the boy and asked him again if he knew where the Americans were. Oh, yes, he knew; I should follow him. He seemed to be sure of his direction, but I felt certain the Overhaul Park could not be so far away. I tried to draw him into a conversation; neither of us, though, under-

stood the other's French! By this time, I knew that the boy must be mistaken as to the location I wanted. However, a spirit of adventure gripped me, and I felt willing to follow the boy's lead to whatever place he might take me. We were walking continually in the shadow of the Wall.

On and on we went. Night had fallen, and darkness surrounded us. Gas lamps were lit and threw a ghostly light upon the road. Factories loomed up, their bright lights throwing a fantastic glare into our eyes. People came along, looked at the two of us a moment, and passed. We crossed the wide opening of one city gate, and then another. An hour slipped by, an hour and a half, and still my guide kept on, walking and walking.

I became tired, but had not the faintest idea where we were going. The thing grew uncanny, suspicious. I wanted to call a halt. But then, what could a mere boy do to harm me? My fears were foolish. Apaches? Bah, be sensible! Keep going! This was interesting. Another half hour. That made it two. Two hours of continuous walking along the City Wall. Now—

We stood before another city gate. The boy turned into the gate and beckoned me to follow. It led through a dilapidated quarter—old, dirty.hovels all around, squalid dives, dingy stores, filthy wineshops. A half-starved mongrel dog loped toward us down the street, stopped, turned, sniffed unceremoniously at my leather puttees, trotted along a little way, eyed me with strange looks, then slunk into the gutter. Poorly clad and coarse-visaged individuals, lounging



against the buildings and doorways, saw us coming, broke off their conversation, stared at us, followed us with silent glances. I felt uncomfortable, alarmed.

We came to a river or canal of some sort. The water seemed as black as ink. The boy left the street and walked down the dirt road that skirted the embankment. I stopped. This appeared just a trifle too dark and lonesome a region to suit me. My suspicions were now thoroughly aroused. But the boy, with the most unperturbed mien in the world, pointed ahead and remarked:

"Ici, monsieur."

Where? I saw nothing but dimly lighted darkness in front of me. The boy walked on. I followed slowly, cautiously, on the alert. Then —

"Ici, monsieur. Les Américains!"

I saw a barbed-wire inclosure, a gate, and an American soldier standing guard. So the boy had been right after all! I thanked the youngster and gave him a tip. Then I walked up to the sentinel.

"What place is this, buddy?"

"The Aviation Advance Depot, sir."

"Could I see one of the officers?"

"Certainly, sir."

He called for someone. A soldier came to the gate and led me to the Officers' Mess. My watch now showed six fifteen, and half a dozen officers had assembled for supper. We introduced ourselves, and the C. O. invited me to dine. When I related my little experience, they had a hearty laugh at my expense and

thought it amusing that a "sky-pilot" had to be rescued by the aviators! And I laughed with them.

Three of these officers went into the city to attend a show that night, so they took me along in their car until we reached the Place de l' Opera. The Richmond was but a short distance away.

Next morning I phoned to the Overhaul Park. When Lt. Kelly, of the Purchasing Department, got on the wire, I explained the situation to him. The present truck train from Verneuil would return with a cargo, he said; but it might be possible to arrange the load in such a manner that one or two trucks could pick up supplies from the K. of C. In any event, he felt that he could promise to find space to take enough along for the men in the hospital.

The next two days I spent in visiting many points of historical and artistic interest, so profusely scattered over the length and breadth of this marvelous city. I saw the ancient Roman arena and the Palais des Thermes, in which Julian the Apostate was proclaimed Emperor of Rome; I sauntered through the Abbey of Saint Denis, with the tombs of the French kings, from Dagobert up to Louis XVI; I stood in Les Invalides before the sarcophagus of Napoleon Bonaparte, who brought France to the top of the world out of the bloody turmoil of the Red Terror; I gazed at the panorama of heroes from the present World War, portrayed so vividly in the Pantheon de la Guerre:

and as I did so, the cultural and political progress of two thousand years of European history flashed before my view and impressed itself upon my soul with a force and weight that staggered the imagination and left the mind dazed and well-nigh crushed. And then, with startling suddenness, I was torn out of the contemplation of the past and thrown into an epochal event of the present, that made me forget all the ruins of bygone magnificences.

Wilson had arrived!

Saturday, the fourteenth of December, 1918, will always be remembered as a remarkable day in this City of Great Events. Paris declared a holiday. Shops were closed, and business was suspended. The entire city was on its feet to welcome the Prophet of Idealism. Along the line of march, the boulevards were packed with a solid mass of human forms. Only with the greatest difficulty could people move along the fringe of this densely crowded multitude.

By the time I reached the Madeleine, I saw no possibility of going farther. The streets were blocked on all sides. Under the circumstances my only hope lay in obtaining a vantage point somewhere in the portico of the Madeleine itself. But as I looked there, my hope vanished. Many thousands occupied the front of the church and the long line of steps leading up to the portico. I stood in back of the crowd at the juncture of the Boulevard Madeleine and the Rue Royale. The situation seemed hopeless. Hopeless, perhaps, to any-



one but Americans. Two doughboys came along, looked at the crowd, and scratched their heads. I addressed them:

"You can't get through, boys."

"Hardly, Chaplain. Then how about going up there on the platform of the Church?"

"How can you? There's an iron fence."

"That's easy. Just jump the fence."

"It's pretty high."

"Oh, that's nothing!"

Like schoolboys we helped each other to scale the fence; and, with the assistance of a few willing Frenchmen on top, we managed to reach the portico. So far, so good. We were there, but our view was obstructed by rows on rows of persons in front of us. I walked over to the other side, where the Boulevard Malesherbes cuts into the Rue Royale.

What I saw made me smile. A doughboy had found a small ladder somewhere, "borrowed it temporarily," and brought it up here to the Madeleine! He leaned it up against the second pillar from the front, climbed to the top, and had an excellent view. A young Frenchman stood on a lower rung. When the doughboy saw me standing there, looking vainly for an opening in the crowd, he ordered the French lad down, and called out to me:

"Come up here, Chaplain; you can see everything from here."

"Thanks, buddy."

I did not hesitate to accept his invitation. I had never seen a President of the United States before,

and here in Paris I had my first, and perhaps last, opportunity. I occupied a most fortunate position.

The spectacle down below was inspiring. The entire stretch of the Rue Royale from the Madeleine to the Place de la Concorde had been swept free of traffic. Not a soul moved on that vast avenue. French soldiers, in horizon-gray uniforms and with fixed bayonets, held a straight line on each side along the whole route. The space between the soldiers and the buildings was packed by a colorful crowd of eager spectators. All the windows of the buildings were crammed with people, every face turned in the direction of the Place de la Concorde.

And then it happened. A crack regiment of infantry marched toward us, with perfect precision and in beautiful rhythm. A detachment of buglers rent the air with flourishes and fanfares that rang out with glorious delight.

Down in the distance a faint sound penetrated to us. It came nearer and nearer; grew and grew; increased and increased; louder and louder; mightier and mightier; a shout, a scream, a roar; a tidal wave; a thundering Niagara; a sweeping, swelling, crushing deluge of human voices rolling forward in one gigantic volume of sound, reaching us, engulfing us, drowning us, tearing us along in its swirling momentum, until we, too, became one with that frenzied, deafening mass cheer:

"Vive Pres-ee-dent Weel-son! Vive Pres-ee-dent Weel-son! Vive Pres-ee-dent Weel-son!"

And there he came. Seated in an open carriage,

next to the old Tiger, Clemenceau. Again and again that tremendous roar of welcome rose to the sky, wave on wave, until it seemed that the heavens would burst asunder. The crowds strained against the line of soldiers, to break through, to surround him, to take him, to carry him. But the line of soldiers held firm.

He was their demi-god. The New Messiah. The idol of Paris. And Wilson smiled.

Well might he smile. Perhaps never before, in all the history of France, did Paris tender an outsider, a foreigner, an ovation of such stupendous magnitude. Six months ago, France saw herself on the brink of defeat, bowed to the dust, beaten. But young, spirited, enthusiastic America rushed to the Marne, held the front, and stemmed the tide; and then plunged and tore and slashed a way through line after line in one of the most ferocious battles of history, dealing the one, great, vital blow that ended the war. France was saved, and France acknowledged it. Acknowledged it here, as Wilson passed before its eyes. These hundreds of thousands gave vent to their emotions in a thunderous shout of welcome, in a frenzy of happiness, in a delirium of joy. America saved France. And Wilson was the embodiment of America.

He held the heart of France in his hand. As he passed through the Rue Royale, in front of the Madeleine, and down the Boulevard to the left, he carried the city by storm. A march of triumph. No Caesar of old ever obtained a greater popular tribute. He was the darling of Paris. Soon the distance swallowed him



from our sight; but the cry of the hour smote our ears over and over:

“Weel-son! Weel-son! Weel-son! Weel-son!”

All that day and all that night Paris celebrated, mainly that night. In the bright illumination of the streets, so different from the deathlike darkness of these thoroughfares in wartime, hundreds of thousands and millions of people swarmed over the boulevards and squares in everchanging and never-ending streams.

In the multicolored picturesqueness of its military setting, the world had never seen its equal. Sons of every land were there. French poilus, dark-skinned Territorials, Italians, Belgians, Poles, Roumanians, British, Canadians, Anzacs, Americans—all were present in that boiling, frothing vortex of swirling humanity, the heroes whom this million-voiced population of Paris adored. The Americans, though, were the special objects of its love and devotion.

Our headquarters at the Hotel Crillon and the palace of Prince Murat, the temporary home of President and Mrs. Wilson, were the two poles which attracted every Parisian's heart that night. Outside the President's home the milling masses were shouting and singing in a bedlam of turbulent joy. Men and women, civilians and soldiers moved about in ecstatic glee, sending up cry after cry that rocked the Capital from end to end:

“Vive Weel-son! Vive l'Amérique! Vive les Américains!”

For hours all traffic in the center of the city remained hopelessly paralyzed. Even the omnipresent taxies had vanished. The streets were so dense with people, they could not pass. One bold and brave driver attempted the impossible. Coming in from a small side street, he honked his horn for many minutes, imperiously demanding passage. The surging crowd chaffed and baited him laughingly, but refused to stop and leave him through. In his desperation he edged up and drove his car slowly into the marching multitude, but he did not proceed very far. The playful mob surrounded the taxi, swung it into the middle of the boulevard, and pushed it ahead. The driver remonstrated, gesticulated, begged, and threatened, but to no avail. Some jumped on the running board, others sat on the hood, one or two climbed on top, while dozens of hands grasped the body of the car and shook it like a toy. A lady and a man were inside, and the lady screamed in fright and terror. But the marchers meant no harm. They pushed the taxi along, singing some comical song with such fervor and gusto that the driver and the occupants finally laughed, sat back, and joined in the lilting song with the rest.

The frolicking crowd took a special delight in stealing the "monkey caps" of American soldiers. If a doughboy stood at the curb, peacefully enjoying the scene, some Frenchman would slip from the crowd, dart up to the unsuspecting lad, whip off his cap, and rush back into the mob, before the surprised boy had time to realize what had happened. Usually an expres-

sion of anger momentarily flashed across his face; then, catching the spirit of the jest, he would laugh, leap into the street, plunge through the cheering crowd, and presently emerge again with some poilu's kepi rakishly adorning his head. At one time I stood at the corner of a street, next to the imposing figure of a Parisian policeman, delighting in the antics of these passing thousands, when a poilu came running up and complained to the policeman with machine-gun volubility, that a "soldat Américain" had stolen his cap. This worthy minion of law and order listened to him patiently, and then told him with magnificent sangfroid to go and steal another!

Paris was out to enjoy itself, and Paris knew how to do it. At the Place de la Concorde and the Étoile, tens of thousands of people were moving about, singing and dancing. And when the gaiety of the wildly happy populace reached its climax, groups of soldiers and civilians would rush over to the captured German cannons standing there in sinister lines, drag them out, place some girls on top, and haul them through the avenues and boulevards, chanting the Marseillaise and other patriotic songs. Wherever they went they were greeted with salvos of roaring cheers. And if an American soldier mounted such a gun, raised his cap, and shouted "Vive la France!" the enthusiasm burst all bounds, and shout on shout rose up through the night like the thunder of the storm-swept surf on a rockbound shore:

"Vive les Américains! Vive Weel-son!"



Far into the night the Parisians continued their carnival of joy. For a long time after retiring I could hear the delirious shouts roll over the city. Then I fell asleep, and all through my dreams I saw the picture of frenzied millions and heard the roar of their joy-drunk cheer—"Américains!—Amérique!"

Next day was Sunday—quiet, peaceful, solemn. Soul-resting and soul-quickenings. Doubly so, after the madness of the day before. I said Mass at the Madeleine and then strolled down the sun-lit avenues to the Church of St. Gervais that had been struck by the shell from the Big Bertha, the seventy-five-mile range gun hidden in the Forest of St. Gobain, with which the Germans had bombarded Paris in the spring of the year.

Seeing the front door at the right open, I entered, and slowly tiptoed down the aisle. Boards shut off the entire rear of the center nave, so I could see nothing of the damage wrought by the Great Gun. Someone was preaching in French. A strong, resonant, melodious voice rang out with power and clearness. The first words that reached my ears shot through my mind with striking familiarity: "Pénitence! Pénitence! Pénitence!"

Interested and curious, I stepped up to the end of the boarded inclosure and looked at the speaker. A Capuchin like myself, the first and only one I ever saw in France. A big-boned, robust-statured man; elderly and stately; with a white, patriarchal beard

flowing over his powerful chest. He spoke with tremendous seriousness, and yet with a remarkable mildness.

A priest came down the aisle. I stopped him and introduced myself.

"Oh, would you like to meet Father Hilary, mon Père?"

"I certainly would."

"Then come with me."

So we walked down the aisle, crossed the sanctuary, and entered the sacristy. The sermon came to an end soon, and the venerable Capuchin stepped into the room. With many gestures, the French priest told him that I was an American Capuchin and a chaplain in the army. The old man looked at me for a moment. Then his face lit up with a sunny smile, and his lips burst into an exclamation of joyous surprise:

"Ah! Mon frère!"

And extending his arms he embraced me, pressed me to his bosom, and kissed me on both cheeks! I was deeply touched. We conversed together. The French priest knew English and acted as interpreter, whenever my stumbling French brought a questioning look upon the mobile features of my old confrere.

Before leaving I went into the inclosure in the rear of the church. To me it seemed a sanctuary within a sanctuary. I looked up. An enormous hole gaped through the clerestory, and beyond it I could see the deep blue of the noonday sky. From out of that sky the shell had come. As I stood there, lost in reverent

thought, my mind traveled back to the event of that fateful, tragic day.

It was Good Friday. March twenty-ninth.

Just a week before the first big shells had begun to drop on Paris. They came with deadly regularity. Every twelve minutes. The sheer certainty paralyzed, and the people were frantic with fear. And up on the Somme the Big Drive raged fiercely. The line had crumpled on a sixty-mile front. The enemy marched toward Paris. The end seemed near. The war lost. France indeed went through her Passion Week.

And now—Good Friday. The Day of Agony. The Day of Darkness. The Day of Terrors. The churches filled to overflowing. With mourning, praying, pleading souls. Hundreds crowded into St. Gervais in the afternoon to attend the Way of the Cross.

Devoutly they follow the Lord on His Via Dolorosa.

The Lord moves down the rough-paved streets, carrying His bitter cross. Ah, they, too, have their cross to bear!

Jesus staggers, stumbles, falls; falls, with His Blessed Face buried in the dust. They, too, are sinking beneath the crushing weight of sorrow and pain!

Jesus meets His mother; and what a pang pierces their tender hearts! These mothers, too, have sons up there on the way to death, but they cannot go to meet them!

Jesus climbs the road to Calvary; is stripped; is



nailed; is raised on high; suffers. Oh, for them here, too, this day is Golgatha, a nailing to the cross!

"God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me!"  
Darkness. Dereliction. No one to help, no one to help!

The ninth hour.—Three o'clock.

Jesus dies.— —

The multitude kneels hushed.

And then—a crash! A roar! Cries! Screams!  
Shrieks! Moans!

"Jesus! Jesus!"

Tons of stone come tumbling down upon the praying people, crushing them, battering them, pounding them to death! Men, women, children, lie weltering in their warm red blood! Two hundred, mutilated; fifty, killed. The shell had done its work.

Crucifixion.

*Consummatum est.*

They did not shed their blood in vain. These innocent victims brought mercy from on high. The enemy was stopped. The Lord of Hosts had heard their prayer. Soon there would be singing in the churches.

A thundering, glorious Te Deum.

Victory!

I left and walked out into the sunshine.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A TRIP WITH A CONSCIENCE

"Billet a Château-Thierry!"

The lady behind the grilled window of the Gare du Nord slowly made out my ticket and pushed it toward me. I paid the fare and hurried away in the direction of the tracks. I had no time to lose. Hardly had I entered a compartment and deposited my musette, when the train puffed out of the station. After a few minutes a lieutenant opened the door, looked in, and asked:

"Do you mind if I come in here with you, Chaplain?"

"Not at all, Lieutenant. Your company will be very welcome. I'm alone, as you see."

He tossed his baggage into a corner and seated himself beside me. He was a young chap, bright of eye and lean of face.

"I suppose, Chaplain, you came to Paris to see the big hullabaloo of Wilson's reception?"

"Not exactly, I had official business; but I had the good fortune to be present at the big doings last Saturday. Now I'm going back to camp."

"What camp?"

"Verneuil. Reconstruction Park. Motor Transport outfit, between Nevers and Dijon."

"Between—? Why, you're on the wrong train and going in the wrong direction entirely! You should have left Paris from the Gare de Lyons."

His surprise made me laugh. "Oh, but you see, Lieutenant, I'm making a detour. I want to stop off at Château-Thierry and then swing around the ring back home."

"What's doing at Château-Thierry?"

"Nothing. I want to visit Joyce Kilmer's grave, if I can find it."

"Who's he?"

"Kilmer? Just a poet, chivalrous and patriotic, who got killed around there somewhere. Belonged to the famous New York Sixty-Ninth."

"I didn't imagine you could get permission to go there for that."

Now it was my turn to look surprised. "Permission? From whom?"

"The Army authorities. You know, they usually don't allow anyone up on the old front, unless on official business. You haven't got permission then?"

"No."

"How are your orders made out?"

"For Paris. Why shouldn't I go up to Château-Thierry on the way back?"

"Don't know. Of course, you're not A. W. O. L. But you might be considered 'Off Bounds,' if you ask me."

"Off Bounds! Great scott, Lieutenant, you scare me! What shall I do?"



"Bluff it out. That's about all you can do now." By way of an afterthought he added laughingly: "As a chaplain you ought to be able to get away with murder."

I sat there, pondering disagreeable thoughts. The situation did not appeal to me. I had left Paris in a happy frame of mind, glad of the opportunity to see Château-Thierry and visit Kilmer's grave. Now I discovered a fly in my ointment. "Off Bounds"—it sounded ugly. My unmilitary conscience gave me a decided military tweak. I could not leave the train and return to Paris, having been "checked out" there. If stopped anywhere along the line and questioned, I could, of course, plead ignorance. The answer, however, to such a plea invariably sounded: "Ignorance is no excuse in the Army." Being an officer, the M. P.'s could not put me under arrest. But they could report me to the Provost Marshal General, who would then send a notice to my Colonel demanding an explanation from me as to why and wherefore I had been where I should not be. And if my explanation proved insufficient in his judgment, the Colonel might be directed to use disciplinary measures. In that case this little trip would bring me unpleasant notoriety, which, as a chaplain, I anxiously wished to avoid. Up to the present I had always moved within the strict limits of military law.

On the other hand, my presence might not really be considered off bounds; the lieutenant did not seem

entirely sure of my status. So nothing remained but to continue my journey and hope for the best.

After an hour and a half's ride, at 9:20 A.M., the train came to a halt at Château-Thierry. I looked out. The shell-battered hulk of the station stared at me, and in front of it stood at least half a dozen M.P.'s! No mistake—the omnipotent blue and red brassard was plainly visible. How could I escape their notice? I made a quick decision.

On the off-side of the train, where the M.P.'s could not see me, I jumped to the ground, walked back the entire length of the train, and clambered up the embankment to the highway that led into the city. With a chuckle in my heart for having outwitted the M.P.'s, I sauntered down the dusty white road. Before entering the city I stopped and looked about me.

I stood in the midst of a valley running east and west, about two miles wide. To the north and south were high hills. Château-Thierry lay close to the abruptly rising ledge on the north side; and there, too, flowed the Marne. The whole valley and the slopes of the hills shimmered with a faded green in the bright rays of the morning sun; and, although it was the seventeenth of December, the air was mildly warm.

Not a living thing in sight—no cattle in the fields, no wagons or cars on the road. No men, women, or children anywhere. Not a single wisp of smoke that curled to the sky from factory or farmhouse or home. An undisturbed silence hung over landscape and city.

A peace that gripped the soul like a pain. The peace and silence of death. And before me lay a murdered city.

Château-Thierry and the Marne—how differently now from a few months back! Then this quiet valley had been a roaring inferno, in which battles surged in a flaming wave of destruction. Across these open spaces, over these lazily sleeping fields, up and down these wooded hills, armies fought in a welter of blood and death, fiercely clawing each other to pieces. From house to house, from tree to tree, from hole to hole, soldiers ran and leaped and crept and crawled, snaking their way along in the dust and dirt, sweeping everything before them with a hail of bullets from the spurting mouths of the deadly machine guns and the sniping rifles. The staccato crackle of the machine guns and the sharp cough of the rifle mingled with the terrific roar of the shells overhead. From behind the ramparts of the northern hills and over the high plateau to the south the combined batteries of both armies sent a deluge of shells screeching and whining and swooping into this valley, ripping the air with peal on peal of rumbling thunder, punctuated with the barking blasts of the guns and the tearing crash of the bursting shells, until the earth trembled under the concussion of the monstrous bombardment.

And in the horror of this inferno men fought and fell and bled and died—died miserable, in concentrated agony, pierced, torn, mangled, rent asunder,



blown to bits—a sickening mass of flesh and blood and dirt.

But now no longer. All over—peace! As quiet as the lonely waste of a desert. Not a soul about. None but myself.

I walked into the city. A graveyard of homes stretched out before me, empty and forlorn. The thriving, bustling city of former days had become a mere aggregation of houses from which the families had fled in terror and tears. As the battle-torn remnants of Joffre's retreating columns marched through the unhappy city, they encountered the fear-crazed, panic-stricken inhabitants fleeing before the victorious guns of the invading army. And far over the hills they could see the rolling clouds of the dense, black smoke and the red glare of the shooting flames, as house on house caught fire and crumbled into ruins.

As I walked down the deserted streets, black, charred houses stuck their gaunt walls like skeleton arms into the sky, gutted from roof to cellar. Scarcely a building remained intact, free from the pockmarks of bullets and the gaping holes of shell fire. With merciless precision the artillery had pounded its devastating steel into these buildings, reducing the strategic points into a formless rubble of plaster and brick and stone.

While strolling leisurely along, I became aware that even here in the town M.P.'s were present. I side-stepped them wherever I could. Twice, though,

it happened that I found myself in the middle of the block, when an M.P. turned the corner; then I kept right on, as nonchalant as possible. Each time I expected to be halted with a polite "Pardon me, sir"; but I must have appeared perfectly *en milieu* to them, for they saluted gravely and passed.

I came to the Marne. In my imagination, it had been larger. Still it was a formidable military obstacle at that. Two bridges crossed the stream in the very heart of the city. Here our boys of the 7th Motorized Machine Gun Battalion of the Third Division had rushed into position last June, covering the retreat of the French troops before the bridges were blown up; and here they held the southern bank for days in the face of a withering German fire, halting the advance of the enemy on the other side of the river. Here the first American blood had been spilled in the Second Battle of the Marne.

While standing on the river front, a large church in the northwest part of the city attracted my attention. I crossed the engineers' bridge and went to see it. A beautiful edifice, with a massive square tower, rose before my eyes. Shells had struck it in many places. I stepped inside. The windows were gone, and shells had dropped into the church, cracking and splintering the pillars, statues, and altars. I longed for a souvenir. Glancing around, I noticed a little stairway leading to the organ loft in the rear. Paintings hung on the walls, the pictures for the most part blown loose from the frames. I climbed the little stairway and lifted up

one of the pictures hanging there, covered with dust and jaggedly cut in many places by the flying fragments of exploding shells. The oil painting, very old, represented St. Sebastian, Emperor Diocletian's Captain of the Imperial Guards, tied to a tree and pierced with an arrow. A piece of shell had gone straight through his heart! This would indeed be a marvelous souvenir of Château-Thierry! I felt tempted to annex it without further delay, before profane hands might ruin it; but, could I conscientiously do this? I decided to leave it there on the wall.

On stepping out of the church, I nearly ran into a French priest. He wore a black soutane, not a uniform, and that surprised me greatly, for I never expected anything like this here. In broken French I asked him if he were the curé of the church? No: but he could take me to the curé's home. Did I so desire? I did. Then I should come with him.

On the way I introduced myself, and his joy in meeting an American fellow priest was delightful. We walked about a block or two. Reaching the home of the curé, my guide rang the bell. A moment later the door opened, and an elderly, gray-haired, ascetic-looking priest, quite evidently somewhat embarrassed on seeing an American officer, invited us into his house. My companion introduced me, and the face of the good curé glowed with pleasure. He insisted that we stay; but the other excused himself and left, while I followed the curé into his living room.

We chatted for awhile in French and, when he no



longer understood me, in Latin. He bestowed great praise on the American soldiers who had fought at Château-Thierry and throughout this whole region; and I returned the compliment by lauding the achievements of the French. All the while my thoughts dwelt on Joyce Kilmer's grave. After some time I inquired of him if he knew the American soldiers' cemetery? He did, and a few minutes' walk would take us there; he would lead me to it. So we departed.

The road sloped gently up the shoulder of the rising ledge, and in a few minutes we arrived at our destination. To the right one saw the parish cemetery. The cruelty of war could not even spare the sanctified tombs of the dead. Monuments were shattered, and the shells had disturbed the graves. To the left of the road the fallen soldiers had been laid to rest in a field. There were hundreds and hundreds, French and American, and rows on rows of wooden crosses.

At the gate we paused; and as my eyes roved over the many graves, the thought of Joyce Kilmer and his death moved me deeply. We had never met, but he had always commanded my spirit's friendship and my mind's love. I had reveled in his sweet and finely tempered lines; tinkling with the music of silver bells and rocking with the lilt of his sunny laughter. Instinctively his delicate and beauty-impassioned soul must have loathed the vileness and brutality of war. But, being the soul of a poet, it could draw inspiration even from hideousness; and, being the soul of Kilmer, it found romance even in the great adventure of

death: for his was a chivalrous warrior soul, clothed with "the splendor of humanity," battling for ideals. He had the shining soul of a Galahad, and like this gallant knight of old he rose in the war to the sublimest heights of devotion.

More than anyone else, Joyce portrayed himself in the superb lines of the last poem he wrote:

### THE PEACEMAKER

Upon his will he binds a radiant chain,  
 For Freedom's sake he is no longer free.  
 It is his task, the slave of Liberty,  
 With his own blood to wipe away a stain.  
 That pain may cease, he yields his flesh to pain.  
 To banish war, he must a warrior be.  
 He dwells in Night, eternal Dawn to see,  
 And gladly dies, abundant life to gain.

What matters Death, if Freedom be not dead?  
 No flags are fair, if Freedom's flag is furled.  
 Who fights for Freedom, goes with joyful tread  
 To meet the fires of Hell against him hurled,  
 And has for Captain Him whose thorn-wreathed head  
 Smiles from a Cross upon a conquered world.

Kilmer's pen here dipped into the very essence of his being, and with this he wrote his own resplendent epitaph. And then came the bullet of fate that pierced his brain and released his soul, speeding it up to the regions above, where he sings of the nobler beauty and the fuller harmony, the glory of which no poet can utter. All that he left here below was the mortal shell which had harbored his flaming spirit, and here I hoped to find its resting place.

Slowly, reverently, with bared head I examined every American grave. Upon each cross a soft-lead plate had been fixed, into which were deeply scratched the name and organization of the soldier. Marines were there, and Regulars, and National Army men. On all too many of these plates I read the sad inscription: "Unknown Soldier." But nowhere did I find the name of Joyce Kilmer.

"You didn't find the one, mon Père?"

"No, monsieur, I didn't find it."

"Was he killed here?"

"Somewhere near Château-Thierry."

"Belleau Woods contains many dead American soldiers. *Beaucoup! Beaucoup!*"

He shook his gray head from side to side, and his eyes were moist. We both knelt down and said a little prayer for all these lads who had fought so well and died so bravely. I left this hallowed spot with sadness and with keenest disappointment: my quest had been in vain.

Many months passed before I discovered that they had laid him down to his last long sleep at the edge of the Wood of the Burned Bridge, a short stroll from the village of Seringes, at the place where he had fallen on July 30, 1918, close to the banks of the babbling Ourcq. Nothing could be more fitting than that Joyce Kilmer should be buried beneath the "Trees" which he had glorified in an immortal poem.

The curé and I walked back, and he invited me to dinner, which I gladly accepted. During the course



of the meal I asked him for the picture of St. Sebastian, to place it in our college museum.

"It is totally destroyed, monsieur."

"We will look at it, mon Père."

So after dinner we returned to the church. Again I climbed the little winding stairs, held up the painting, and showed him the shell wounds in the body of the Saint.

"May I have it?"

"Oui, oui, oui, oui, mon Père. Take it!"

I borrowed the pocketknife of a French poilu who had just then entered the church, cut the picture completely out of its frame, and rolled it carefully. The good curé took a few newspaper sheets which had been placed as a covering over an altar nearby and wrapped them around the picture. This done, we left the church.

I now had to depart. With a heartfelt word of thanks for his hospitality and kindness I bade him good-by.

"Adieu, monsieur."

"Au revoir, mon Père."

And with my precious souvenir tucked gently under my arm I walked rapidly down the streets, across the bridge, and out along the Paris road toward the railway station.

The train, due at 13:24 (1:24 P.M.), would arrive very soon. The thought of the M.P.'s again worried me a little. They were probably in the station waiting for the train. I slipped down the embankment, and

keeping out of view behind some freight cars, I waited until the train rolled up and stopped. Then I hurried along its side, opened a door, and stepped into a compartment. I breathed a sigh of relief; everything had gone smoothly. If the rest of my journey proved as successful in eluding the sharp-eyed M.P.'s as my stay here in Château-Thierry, all would be well.

As the train sped toward the east, my eyes drank in the scenery. The litter and débris of war could be seen strewn about everywhere. Shattered trucks and ammunition wagons, field kitchens and autos, gun carriages and caissons, lay ditched by the roads. Across the river an airplane had dug itself nose first into the soil, a solitary wreck alone in a field. The trenches and foxholes along the river bank, the barbed-wire entanglements and chevaux-de-frise, the artillery placements behind the railway beds and woods, the shell craters and broken bridges, all gave evidence of the bloody battles that had once been waged for the possession of the Marne. And along the route were ruined farms and ruined towns. Dormans, Epernay, and Chalons-sur-Marne were wrecked into a mass of shell-torn, toppling, crumbling walls, a mere shadow of their former selves. The sight was tragic.

At Vitry-le-François I had to change trains. No M.P.'s here, as far as I could see, but a large number of poilus were standing around. After awhile they boarded a train waiting on another track. Among the

various coaches I noticed a few odd contraptions—double-deck railway cars! Since I had never been in such a peculiar coach, I thought I would like the experience and climbed with a number of poilus to the upper deck of one. I had to stoop, so as not to bump my head against the ceiling. Benches of bare wood filled the car. I sat in one of the first seats, with a middle-aged poilu next to me, and at 15:46 (3.46 P.M.) we left Vitry-le-François.

As we bowled along, I obtained the experience I desired; but it did not suit my fancy. A dingy kerosene lamp, dangling from the low ceiling, lit up the place most sparingly. The air became thick with the breathing and body exhalation of so many unwashed men; and the atrocious tobacco they smoked filled the small space with a horrid odor, and as the sun went down, it grew bitter cold. One of the small windows next to me had a broken pane, and through this the wind blustered with a sharpness that pierced me to the bone. I stuffed a newspaper into the opening; the next moment, though, an angry gust of air blew it clear to the end of the car. So I pulled my trench coat tight about my knees and dug my hands into its pockets, trying the best I could to keep warm. In this miserable journey of five hours to Chaumont I suffered intensely from the moist chill air of the night.

At Chaumont I expected to take the "American Special" that ran to Tours, but when we arrived at 20:43 (8:43 P.M.) it was nowhere to be seen. Noth-



ing remained for me to do but boldly to make inquiry of the M.P. who strode up and down the platform in solemn and solitary majesty.

"When does the Special leave, buddy?"

"It left some time ago, sir."

"When does the next train go toward Dijon and Nevers?"

"Eight, tomorrow morning, sir."

"Nothing tonight?"

"No, sir."

A fine mess indeed! To be compelled to stay overnight in Chaumont, at the very door of General Headquarters, where they knew the number of every camp in the A. E. F.! But I saw no avenue of escape from my quandary. "Bluff it out," the lieutenant had said, and my only hope now lay in that. "Faint heart ne'er won" a Provost Marshal!

I walked through the station to the R. T. O.'s booth, put down my travel orders, turned aside, and eagerly engaged an officer in conversation. I heard the plunk-plunk of a rubber stamp.

"Here you are, Chaplain."

The sergeant handed me my orders, properly viséed and signed. I was still a free man, and could enter the town for the night! At the Hôtel de la France I ordered a luncheon and asked for a lodging. All lodgings in the town were taken, so I started out walking the streets, not knowing where to go. Presently I met an officer carrying his pack; he would certainly be in the same predicament.

"Pardon me, Captain. Where do you intend to bunk tonight?"

"At the Y, Chaplain."

"Have they beds?"

"I think so."

"May I walk along with you? I don't know where it is."

"Sure. Hop along."

We went to the Y, where I obtained a room, and soon drifted into dreamland. Next morning I rose early and took breakfast. Passing out of the dining room, whom should I meet at the door but the very one I feared to meet, Senior Chaplain Major Moody!

"Well, well! Look who's here—Father Biddell!"

He had the name wrong, but the right person.

"And what are you doing here at G. H. Q.?"

"Just passing through on my way back to camp."

"And how is your work progressing among the boys?"

We conversed for a brief space, and the Senior Chaplain excused himself: "Very, very busy, you know." I breathed a sigh. Then I went back to my room, slung my musette over my shoulder, grabbed the painting of St. Sebastian, and hurried to the station.

Now for the home stretch! My difficulties, however, were not yet over. I had to change cars again at Langres. Having left that city, I felt sure I could travel through to Nevers; there I would tread on safe ground. But soon I found out that the train went no

farther than Dijon, where I would be obliged to stay overnight. Now at Dijon the Motor Transport had an Overhaul Park, and the R. T. O. there would certainly know the location of Reconstruction Park 772. Here might be real trouble. So when the train arrived at Dijon in the late afternoon, I made my exit from the off-side of the compartment, as I had done at Château-Thierry, walked behind some freight cars for about two blocks, and thus entered the city.

The American Red Cross Officers' Hotel gave me lodging for the night. While filling out my locator card, a lieutenant nearby asked me to what organization I belonged. I gave him a searching glance. His face appealed to me, so I answered:

"M. T. C. Park at Verneuil."

"Is that so? Why, I know some of your officers." And with that he mentioned the names of a number of officers from my own mess.

"When are you going back, Chaplain?"

"Tomorrow morning about 3:30."

"That's an unearthly hour to get up. Listen, I'm taking my general's auto from the Army of Occupation down to the port, and I'm traveling alone with a chauffeur. Come along in my car, and I'll take you right to your camp. We'll leave a little after six. How's that?"

"Fine, Lieutenant. I'll consider it a favor."

The next morning, shortly after six, we started on our way. Dijon still lay smothered in darkness; but by the time we were out of the city the east brightened



with the first red glow of the dawn. As we hummed along the road, we reached the crossing of a highway, and there stood an M.P. He held up his right hand; we stopped.

"Orders, please!"

Would the arm of the law never fail to find me? Just when I thought my troubles were ended, I had to be asked for my orders! I fumbled in my pockets for the fatal little paper. In the meantime the M.P. read the lieutenant's travel orders, folded them up and gave them back. Reluctantly I handed mine toward him.

"That's all right, sir. Pass on."

Fate smiled on me, and I nearly burst out laughing as the M.P. saluted gravely and the chauffeur shifted his gears. My heart had been in my throat that time!

We motored through the Côte d'Or, one of the most picturesque sections of France. The highway wound itself through the mountains in a magnificent series of serpentine curves, opening far-off vistas in the heights and depths that delighted the eye with their wonders of color and grace of line. The eastern slopes and the tops of the mountains were ablaze with the golden splendor of the sun, while the western flanks and the deeper valleys were swathed in veils of gorgeous purple and shimmering pink. Brooks and rills, rivulets and streams seemed to break out from nowhere, meeting us at every bend in the road, as we rose and dipped through the undulating land of Bourgogne. Villages and farms, nestling snugly among the

hills and vales, charmingly pretty in their setting of well-tilled fields, came on toward us, tarried for a moment as we rambled through, and disappeared from sight.

Then in the distance the Monts du Morvan seemed to bar our path. But merrily our motor purred its way, twisting among the foothills and up the sloping rises, higher and higher, giving us ravishing glimpses of fertile valleys and wooded summits, with a glory of light from the morning sun turning it all to a magic picture of fairyland. Château-Chinon rose up like a vision before our gaze, its plastered walls and red-tile gables blended together in softened tints, like a host of swallow nests hanging under the eaves of the sky.

Once over the grade, we slithered and coasted swiftly along, the lowlands spreading before us for leagues on leagues, a multicolored carpet, in which the figures of rivers and towns and groves and farms were woven into an intricate pattern of amazing beauty. And thus I came back to Verneuil.

The officers were seated at the noonday meal when we arrived in camp. They wished to know all about the reception of Wilson in Paris, and why I had stayed so long. When I told them of my journey back home, they chaffed and twitted me uproariously about my groundless fear and worry. As one remarked:

"That's what you get for being a chaplain, Father. Only a chaplain could make such a trip—with a conscience!"

## CHAPTER XV

### WEARY WITH WAITING

Rain and mud. Mud and rain.

Thus ran the unofficial weather forecast every day during the winter months at Verneuil. It never became really very cold, for the temperature seldom fell far below freezing point. Snow, we had practically none at all. Just rain.

But it rained! Sometimes for days on days. During one period of forty-five days it rained at least once in every twenty-four hours—a cold sleety rain that penetrated into every nook and crevice and chilled the very marrow of one's bones.

In the first days of January, the rain poured down from the skies in a miniature deluge. The whole hill flowed with brooklets and rivulets of brown and yellow water. By the fifth of January the entire area of the German prison stockades and of the "Peewee" barracks stood under a swirling flood of water to a depth of two and three feet and more.

Somber, slag-grey clouds hung like lead permanently over the dreary sky, imparting their gloominess to the earth below and to the soldiers who had to work beneath their pall-like darkness. And one never knew when these clouds would burst into a drizzle or



a torrent. The rainy season started in October; but at that time there had been some days in which the sun shone with warmth and gladness. Now, however, the sun disappeared almost entirely. To see the sun was an item of interest and source of comment for the whole camp.

"See the sun today, buddy?"

"Hope to tell the cross-eyed world, I did!"

"Sunny France, eh?"

"Yeah. Liquid sunshine!"

And if we considered the camp during the early part of November as nothing but a mudhole, it now became a veritable sink of mud. I wore hip boots daily for two months. Each morning, on my way to read Mass, before stepping onto the gravel driveway that led from the main road to the château chapel, I would stand in the ditch alongside the road, where the rain water came rushing down the hill, rub one boot against the other, and thus free them from an inch thickness of sticky mud.

Down in the shop yards the working areas were nothing but wide lagoons of fluid mud. The A. D. V. (Animal Drawn Vehicle) section was practically impassable at times. More than one of the officers and soldiers came to grief in this deep clinging morass. Verneuil mud, in the course of time, became very unpoetic and unromantic. The boys called the yards "The Mud Flats of Death Valley."

The constant grind of work and the wretched state

of the weather conspired to make existence miserable and uncomfortable through these long, dreary months of winter. And yet, there were many pleasant hours, too. The physical needs of the men received good care. Board walks linked the various barracks together, so that the sanitation of the sleeping quarters could be brought up to standard requirements. Eventually, too, bathhouses were erected, with hot and cold showers, simple in structure and equipment, but a positive luxury for the water-starved, cootie-infested bodies of the men. Up to this time the only sort of bath in which almost any of us could indulge had been a "tin-can bath"—a tin can filled with heated water, into which we dipped a towel and took a rubdown. After the installment of the bathhouses, we had difficulty in getting some of the more fastidious to come out of the showers at all; a clean warm bath felt simply too delightful.

Another big improvement that appealed to the enlisted men was a model mess hall. Without exaggeration, it is doubtful whether its equal could be found anywhere in the A. E. F. for size, equipment, and convenience. Compared to the "open-air pavilions" which the men had used so far, this constituted a real palace among mess halls. The entire hall covered fifty-five thousand square feet of surface, with a kitchen thirty-six feet wide and three hundred and ten feet long, and five separate dining halls fifty feet wide and one hundred and seventy feet long. Each hall, constructed of wood framing, with sheet-iron roof and

sides, could seat one thousand men comfortably. Every utensil necessary to prepare large quantities of food could be found here: twenty-four 25-gallon cereal cookers, set down into steam tables; fourteen 60-gallon steam kettles for cooking meats, potatoes, and heavy foods; twenty-four large ranges for frying, baking, and roasting; ten 100-gallon coffee urns, which were supplied from a 1,200-gallon tank mounted against the wall; a specially constructed oven, large enough to hold hundreds of pies at one time. Each dining hall had its own scullery, where pots and pans were washed in great quantities with boiling water into which live steam was injected. A laundry furnished clean white aprons, caps, jackets, and towels to the cooks and K.P.'s, so that they could look spick and span on all occasions. The whole mess hall gave a cheerful impression in its white paint and with its profusely distributed electric lights. Most of this elaborate equipment had been manufactured in our shops.

A unique feature of this mess consisted in arranging special dinners for soldiers' clubs and units upon payment for the required foodstuffs. Many a banquet took place in this manner. As an example, the 301 Unit used its mess funds for a splendid banquet as a final get-together affair shortly before we broke camp. The menu contained everything from soup to nuts, furnished in a style reminiscent of the best hotels. One would hardly recognize this as a soldier's meal in any army mess hall in France:



Mock Turtle au Groutons  
Celery Olives  
Brigrange Roast, Veal Brown  
Sauce Dressings a la Hawthorne  
Potatoes en Cream, petit pois a la Francaise  
Hot Biscuits — Butter  
Custard Pie, Jam, Chocolate Cake  
Roquefort Cheese, Crackers  
Mixed Nuts  
Cigars Cigarettes  
Coffee, Cocoa

Captain Golding, who hailed from Texas, had charge of this efficient and model mess hall, and so it was promptly and properly called "The Lone Star Cafe."

As the bodily needs of the soldier boy received adequate attention to insure his health and physical well-being, so, too, the camp furnished recreational diversions to relieve his mind and elevate his spirit.

Every night except Sundays, motion pictures were shown in the Y theater, with frequent changes of program. Professional entertainers from the States displayed their talents to an appreciative audience in some of the popular successes of the stage, giving us plays like "The Traveling Salesman," "A Pair of Sixes," "Stop Thief," and "Under Cover." Besides our own inimitable "A Buck on Leave" many soldier shows of France regaled us with their delightful productions. Among these were the "The Front Line Minstrels," "The Ordnance Review," "Major Martin's Merry Makers," "The Doughboy's Frolic,"

"The Battle of Bourges," "The Balloonatics," "The Boo Koo Minstrels."

Beginning with New Year's Day, half a dozen or more dances were held for the enlisted men. Official invitations went out to the people of the neighboring towns like Verneuil, Decize, Fours, Cercy-la-Tour, La Machine, and St. Honoré-les-Bains. On the appointed day our chauffeurs drove all available cars and trucks to these places to bring the French girls and their chaperons to the camp; and after a luncheon for the men and their guests, the French people were again brought home. The petites mademoiselles may not have been able to give a perfect exhibition of American dance steps; but everybody had a glorious time, and the men felt happy.

A rather pretentious enterprise that afforded both instruction and amusement was the camp paper with its breezy title "Let's Go!" Its first edition saw the light of day on February thirteenth, and it appeared weekly thereafter in an eight-page, three-column form. The press from which our little camp paper issued had a singular history. According to the advance edition of "Let's Go," the press "is of German extraction, discovered by the Colonel's special committee in the wake of the German retreat somewhere between Pont-a-Mousson and Milwaukee. Just as the Committee was making off with its prize, the late owner of the press, who had been dispossessed by Hindy way back in 1914, put in an appearance. The committee, being law-abiding, thereupon made a deal

with the owner, placing the press in our hands until 1923, at a monthly rental of several million centimes. Provision was also made for ten additional years, if our health holds out."

The editorial policies found expression in a similar vein: "This Journal is conducted by and in the interests of so much A. E. F. as is domiciled in the M. T. R. P., to the end that its burdens may be lightened in these tumultuous times.

"All so domiciled regardless of political affiliation or religious inclinations are requested, yea, entreated, to publish herein their happiest thoughts for the edification of the rest of us.

"The material submitted must be original, born and nurtured in our own little community, or else so cleverly camouflaged with local color that we can't recognize it.

"Contributions must be written in the English language with due regards for the feelings of the Chaplain and the little ladies in the Y. Otherwise the sky is the limit, if you are careful not to push out any stars."

Spicy, witty, and racy, it chronicled the doings and happenings of Hill 772 in a genial and humorous fashion, with all the freshness and newsiness of a true reportorial style, throwing interesting side lights upon persons and conditions in a way that made some squirm and everybody laugh. "Let's Go" proved to be a wonderful tonic for the boys, and it rendered a distinct service in upholding the morale of the camp to the end.



Due to the abominable conditions of place and weather, the various winter sports could not receive the encouragement they deserved. Indoor sports were almost entirely out of the question; still, something was done.

In November, a number of us officers formed the "M.T.R.P. Boxing Club." The "charter members" were Captains Douglas, Maloney, Boggs, Golding, and Swinton; Lieutenants Mealey, Jones, and myself; Judge G. Moore and Mr. Smith of the Y. Captain Maloney was elected chairman of the club, and I became its treasurer. A neat sum had been collected among the officers and turned over to me for safe-keeping and expenditure. Every Tuesday night for a time we had boxing in the form of three-round bouts for the entertainment of the camp. The winner of each bout received the nominal sum of fifty francs; and since I held the strings of the purse, I always obtained a ringside seat! These exhibitions of the "manly art of modified mayhem" attracted a large number of the boys who relished them with great gusto. No bout, however, was allowed to become brutal, for the fighters were, after all, just pals, boxing for the sport of it and for the entertainment of other pals.

One incident in connection with these bouts will remain forever associated with my memory of Hill 772. I handed the winner of one bout the customary sum of fifty francs. He had not expected any money and did not want to accept it at first. However, he

took it, went into the dressing room, and said to his ring partner:

"Look'it, bud! I got fifty frankies for our little racket. Now you worked just as hard as I did and you even got the worst of it. We'll split this fifty-fifty. Here's your twenty-five frankies."

"Naw! You won it and you keep it."

He argued for awhile and finally prevailed upon the loser to accept half the money. About two weeks later I met the winner again, and he stopped me.

"Father, remember the bout I was in, two weeks ago?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"I let my boxing partner have twenty-five out of the fifty you gave me after the fight. The other day we met, and he said to me:

"'Buddy, you made me take twenty-five of your frog soap wrappers after our bout the other night, didn't you? Know what I did with the money? I blew in ten francs for booze and with the other fifteen I shot craps. Well, I won four hundred francs with it. Half of this is your money. Here's two hundred for you; fifty-fifty, you know!'

"Now, what do you think of that, Father? Bread on the waters, eh?"

It both astonished and pleased me.

In the course of time the camp authorities managed to obtain an airplane hangar from somewhere, and rigged it up as a gymnasium for the men. Although

it made its appearance rather late in the season, the boys welcomed it as a valuable adjunct to their sport facilities. Many of them made use of it for gymnastics and all-round athletic training; and, after awhile, a number of spirited basketball games were played in this hangar by different teams of the camp.

Taking all in all, though life was dreary and monotonous during the winter following the Armistice, we somehow managed to foster a spirit of good-fellowship and mutual entertainment that helped to pass the dull time outside of working hours and made the rainy days quite bearable. Besides their many other duties, Chaplain Hickey, successor to Chaplain Wood, and Chaplain Biggs, my Protestant fellow chaplains, performed most excellent and valuable services along these lines.

As for myself, my own duties kept me constantly busy. The camp hospital still remained my chief concern. Conditions were no longer as critical as at the time of the flu, but the number of patients always ran from fifty to one hundred and fifty. Under the able management of Lt.-Col. F. R. Hill, the medical C. O., and Major H. Hubbard, his adjutant, the hospital did splendid work. Surgical cases no longer went to Mars-sur-Alliers, being taken care of by our own staff. New hospital quarters had been erected on the other side of the camp near the road, and the medical and dental departments greatly improved. Death claimed remarkably few victims during the winter.



Cases of measles, mumps, and "pinkeyes" occurred, perhaps the only kind of diseases, outside of pneumonia, that could be styled contagious; these, however, were more or less sporadic and never reached the proportions of an epidemic. Shopwork naturally brought in numerous cases of minor accidents.

Ever since Christmas, persistent rumors floated around the hospital that regular nurses would take charge of our patients; but these rumors always failed to materialize. Then, about the middle of March, our sick lads were agreeably surprised to find their wants attended to by eighteen American army nurses, transferred from Base Hospital No. 63 at Châtreaux to our camp at Verneuil. Upon my entering the first door of the hospital on the morning after their arrival, one lad called out to me:

"Hey, Father, do you notice anything new here?"

I glanced around. "Who tucked the corners of your blankets under the mattress for you?"

"Gee whiz! You saw it right off the bat! Great, isn't it? We've got nurses! Holy mackerel, but it's a grand and glorious feeling to see a real American girl again, to whom you can polly-voo in plain United States! Now we have to watch our step when we talk. No cussing around here anymore! I told this gink next to me, that if he ever shoots off his trap before these nurses as he does otherwise, I'll knock his block off. Right, Father?"

"Right. They are ladies, and you must be gentlemen."

The mere presence of these good nurses proved a tonic to the men. The deft touch of the nurse's hand and the delicacy of her woman's tenderness transformed the drab plainness of the whitewashed ward into something like home. They took the place of mothers to these pain-racked, war-weary, homesick boys. Gentle and pleasant at all times, ever willing and sympathetic, with a smile and a kind word always upon their lips, they moved about from bed to bed, performing their arduous duties with a cheerfulness of spirit that sprang from the very heart of mercy. Brave little souls; the sacrifices they made so generously instilled admiration in us all. They commanded instinctive respect, and their influence upon the character of their charges was of the very best. And not one of these sick lads but would have given the head off his shoulders for his nurse.

Every day, when in camp, I made my rounds from bed to bed; often I visited the hospital two, three, and four times a day, according to necessity and circumstance. The K. of C. of Paris were a great help to me and to the sick. On Christmas each patient received a gift in the form of goodies and smokes. Not only did the K. of C. send down enough creature comforts for a complete issue to the entire camp, but I obtained sufficient supplies from them to enable me to give each sick lad something every day from Christmas until near the time we left for the States—usually a bar of milk chocolate or cigarettes. Besides this I purchased over nine hundred francs worth of candy and oranges

for them, using the Hospital Fund which had been given to me for that purpose.

The hospital was always my chief concern and the main field of my labors; but other things also demanded my attention. Acting as counsel for the defense in court-martial cases consumed a large measure of my time and efforts. Collecting evidence formed a tedious and time-robbing element in this connection. My first case proved fairly successful, and from there on I became a rather busy criminal lawyer—without fees! I found it fascinating work and had the privilege of acting as counsel in a few exceptional cases.

One involved two doughboys of the Prisoner of War Escort Co. No. 18, Private J. G. and Private S. W. Each was accused of violating the 86th Article of War, namely: "Being on guard and posted as a sentinel in time of war, he left his post before he was properly relieved." And also of violating the 96th Article of War, namely: "He left his rifle, ammunition, and side arms in the yards of the M.T.R.P., where prisoners of war were working." As a matter of fact, German prisoners actually discovered the weapons. Anyone with even the most elementary knowledge of military matters will realize the seriousness of such charges in war time. These two men had acted thus in sheer forgetfulness of the explicit instructions they had previously received, and as such they were ordinarily guilty before the law; because ignorance and forgetfulness are no excuse in war time, since dozens of lives may be at stake. However,



through a trick of fate, it chanced on this particular day that a limited chain guard had been posted in this area before they arrived, and so they were entitled to act as they did; they, however, were in total ignorance of this important fact. After a hard battle in court I was able to prove this fact, and both were acquitted.

In another case a doughboy, also of the Escort Co., had killed a German prisoner. He had been detailed to act as guard for a company of prisoners going to work and, while loading his rifle, discharged it accidentally. A column of Germans were marching past at the time, and the bullet pierced the head of one of the prisoners, killing him instantly. The guard was charged with murder and court-martialed accordingly. I defended the lad. Now, even though the charge of murder could not be substantiated by any evidence, it seemed impossible to free him from the charge of "culpable negligence in the use of firearms," inasmuch as he held his rifle at so low an angle while loading that the bullet could kill a man ten or twelve feet distant.

It did not take the Judge Advocate long to detect this phase of the occurrence and hammer it into the minds of the military jury with pitiless insistence. I had but one hope for acquittal. While investigating the life history of this lad in the army, I had found what seemed to me to be a convincing argument of his innocence, and so I had him sworn in as a witness in his own defense. He testified under oath that he had been constantly employed as a cook's helper while in France, and that he had never loaded a rifle in his life

until the morning of the accident. Upon this evidence a spirited battle ensued between the Judge Advocate and myself. He contended that "inspection arms" would be sufficient to instruct a soldier as to the proper angle of elevation for his rifle while loading. I fought this contention on the grounds that the two operations are totally different in nature and that the former will never supply the technique required for the latter. Because, when a soldier, unskilled in the use of firearms, loads his rifle, he will involuntarily concentrate his entire attention upon the complicated loading operation and forget all about the angle of elevation at which the rifle is to be held. Repeated drills alone will make his muscles so automatic in action, that both operations so different in character (elevation and loading) will be carried out correctly at the same time. The court acquitted the accused.

There was an interesting side light to this case. The name of this soldier and his general behavior toward me gave me the impression that he must be a Catholic. I never brought up the subject, though; because, from my standpoint as his counsel, it made no difference what his religious convictions were. During our conversation, I frankly told him that it seemed doubtful to me whether I would be able to disenmesh him completely from the charge of culpable negligence. Naturally, both of us were worried about the outcome. On the way over to the mess hall, where the General Court Sessions were being held, I remarked to him:

"I think we are due for a hard fight, buddy; but

we'll fight to the finish. Don't lose heart. I promised a Mass for the Poor Souls, if we win."

He glanced at me out of the corner of his eyes, dropped his head for awhile, lifted it up again, and asked:

"When do you hear confessions, Father?"

This was a most unexpected question. I looked at him in surprise and then said:

"Why, Saturday nights; or any other time, for that matter. What makes you ask that?"

"I'll be there next Saturday. I haven't been to confession for the last ten years."

And he came, too. It took the death of one soldier to bring the dead conscience of another to life. Along such tortuous ways do souls come back to God!

The other cases I handled pertained to minor infractions of military discipline and were of less interest, though some of them demanded a great deal of time and preparation. They were an illustration of the fact, that, when a soldier gets in trouble, his chaplain gets in trouble, too!

Toward the end of February, a new phase of activity came into my field of labor, far more to my liking than the bickerings and squabbings of court-martial battles. Monsignor J. N. Connolly, Vicar General of the Army in France, sent a communication from Paris, requesting me to urge my Catholic men to go, if possible, to Lourdes for the Feast of the Annunciation on March 25; that being the anniversary of



the main apparition of the Blessed Virgin to little Bernardette Soubirous. He intended to make this an A.E.F. day at Lourdes. I read the circular letter to the soldiers at Sunday Mass. Afterwards the men besieged me with so many questions concerning the necessary leave of absence, that I decided to see the Colonel about it.

When I broached the subject to Colonel Hegeman, he pulled up a chair, and asked me to be seated.

"Lourdes? What and where is Lourdes? Tell me about it, Chaplain."

For fifteen minutes the Colonel sat an attentive and sympathetic listener, while I explained to him why Lourdes was the center of attraction for Catholic pilgrims the world over. When I had finished, he said:

"That is very interesting, and I certainly would like to see the Catholic men of the organization go there. Of course, I haven't the authority to permit them to go so far away; that would have to be handled through Section Headquarters. But I will do this: I will see General Johnson and urge the matter for you. And I feel we can push it through. However, just at present we couldn't spare many men. About five hundred men go on leaves every week now and, since these are two-week leaves, a thousand men are constantly away. We can't afford to cripple the working power of the camp. How many men would you like to have go?"

"I'll leave that to your judgment, Colonel."

"Then, supposing I permit seventy-five to go for a

start? Later on we might send more. How would that be?"

"Excellent."

"Good. You draw up a list of the men whom you would like to see go, and submit the list to the Adjutant. In the meantime I'll speak to General Johnson."

In order not to be stampeded with applicants, I called Sergeant Lambert Wischerath, a splendid and upstanding lad, and instructed him to ask a good Catholic sergeant from the various units to come to me. To these I offered the trip and told them to select some reliable men of their respective units, who would look upon the trip to Lourdes as a pilgrimage and not as a mere pleasure jaunt. I interviewed each of these men, and soon had the list completed and approved by the Colonel.

The Colonel meanwhile had seen General Johnson, and the General was arranging matters with the French railway authorities for a special train to Lourdes. The affair, though, dragged on without any definite answer from the French, so a week before the scheduled start the Colonel sent me in his private car to interview General Johnson personally.

The General I found to be very affable. The American Leave Bureau and the Railway Transportation Office had everything settled; but the French were very slow. In the course of our conversation he expressed his willingness to make arrangements, if at all possible, for special trains to run biweekly or even

weekly, so that every Catholic soldier in the Intermediate Section could visit Lourdes. He would notify us by long distance as soon as he had any definite news.

He phoned two or three days later, regretting to inform us that the French could not see their way clear to run a special at this time. We were in a quandary; but the Colonel was undaunted. He sent Major McCarthy, Lt. English, our R.T.O., and myself, to see the Inspecteur Générale of the Paris-Lyons-Mediterranean Line at Nevers. This worthy gentleman dispatched a lengthy telegram to Paris and obtained a special coach for our men, to be attached to the Orleans-Midi Express. And then he had the great kindness to invite us to his home for dinner.

On telling the Colonel of the final preparations, he turned to me suddenly and said:

"Major McCarthy is making the trip. How about yourself? Are you going, too, Chaplain?"

"Colonel, I haven't the nerve to ask. You see, in January I put in my application for a furlough to Italy, because I desire to see Rome. I feel it would be asking too much to go to Lourdes also."

Colonel Hegeman smiled a broad, genial smile.

"I see. Well, you're going. You will be the Commanding Officer in charge of the group. Get ready."

For a moment I stood there, speechless. My heart gave a bound; there was a choking sensation in my throat; I saw the Colonel's smile as through a mist. Then I pulled myself together.



"Colonel, I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate this."

"It's all right. I hope you enjoy the trip."

With that I left headquarters. Outside it rained, and the road was muddy. But seldom had the world seemed so beautiful to me. The very rain sang a song and the water puddles smiled and the hill laughed out loud, as I trudged through the mud with a blessing in my heart for that bluff old soldier, the Colonel!

## CHAPTER XVI

### PILGRIMS IN KHAKI

A whole night, a long day, and a still longer night of riding. Verneuil to Paris. Straight south through the heart of France—Orleans, Toulouse, Tarbes, down to the foot of the Pyrenees. Lourdes!

Major McCarthy, the seventy-odd men, and myself, arrived on Monday morning, March 24, with the first pale streak of dawn. Very, very tired from the hard, cramped, jerky traveling in the coach, we dragged ourselves along the road that led to the town. The shadows of night were still deep. A sergeant, stationed at Lourdes, brought the men to their assigned quarters, while the Major and I went to the Hôtel de la Grotte. Without further ado, I flung my train-numb body upon the bed and fell dead asleep.

I awoke in the early afternoon. Drawing back the blinds, I raised the window and stood at the casement. There! In the near distance, looming through a gap between the thickly massed, sharply silhouetted pines in the garden below, clear-etched against hills of velvet green and limned against a sky of deepest blue, flashing in the glow of the sun like a pearl among emeralds and amethysts, before my astonished gaze rose the shimmering, majestic Basilica of Our Lady of Lourdes!

*Salve Immaculata!*

The cream-white triple church, snuggled up against the base of the Pyrenees and encircled protectingly by wooded hills and knolls, stood out in bold relief, filling the eye with a picture of stately, radiant beauty. Resting upon the stony eminence of the rock Massabielle, like a trance-bound suppliant on bended knees, with extended arms uplifted in prayer to the heavens above, the sanctuary of Mary Immaculate reared its slender spire high into the blue.

Below the church, I knew, was the Grotto. And, as a dove, held captive in the hands, moves restlessly about to free itself and fly away to its nest, I felt my soul tugging within me, eager to go and make its obeisance at Mary's Shrine. But I curbed its straining. This place was far too holy to mar by undue haste. I had first to envelop my soul with its aura and its atmosphere before I ventured to set foot within the Grotto's hallowed inclosure.

So, after a hurried luncheon, I struggled up the incline of the Pic de Jer and entered the station of the funicular railway, to ascend the Mount.

Slowly the tilted cablecar passed out of the station and up the steep back of the rocky wall, crawling through a tunnel and over a viaduct, until it came to a stop a short distance from the summit. The Mount was a cone-shaped blunt-topped dome of rock, sun-eroded and wind-scarped, bald and barren.

From the Pic de Jer the wide expanse of the surrounding landscape unfolded itself in a marvelous panoramic view.



North, as far as the eye could see, lay the Plain of Tarbes. In soft and gentle curves, the foothills of the Pyrenees swept out into the farther distance, drifting and dwindling away, until lost in the level broadness of the flat-bottomed reaches of the lowlands. Centuries of toil and tillage had converted the plain to a splendidly varied garden. Water meadows, vividly green in their new spring garb; fruitful acres, black and brown and gold in their plow-turned soil; hill-sides, bosky with groves and serried with vines; farms, dotting the pleasant fields in clusters of white: all shone brilliantly in the streaming sunlight of this warm March afternoon.

The view to the south offered a scene of stupendous magnificence. The Pyrenees! Without warning, abruptly, startling in their rugged wildness and fearful grandeur, the towering bodies of the mountains piled up in tumultuous masses of beetling crags and cliffs, as if the earth had been uprooted, and the twisted and mangled fragments flung up into the face of heaven by some Titan in a demoniac rage, only to fall back again in a crumpled chaotic heap. Gigantic ledges of striated limestone and granite heaved their tortured formations into dizzy heights of menacing, unscalable walls, mute evidence of the primordial convulsions of nature, exposing the very entrails of the earth, suddenly frozen and paralyzed into stark, dead, rigid immobility. Jutting out into fantastic shapes and figures, like the creatures of an imagination gone grandly insane, the snow-capped pinnacles rising above the

many-colored slopes presented a spectacle of appalling beauty and majesty.

Below the rim of the white snowbelt, deep chasms yawned hideously, blue-black in everlasting shadows, while on the opposite side the sun swept through the gorges in an avalanche of light, splashing the rock-bound valleys with a gorgeous profusion of million-tinted colors.

Southward from the foot of the Pic de Jer, cutting through the ribs of the mountain like the huge slash of a giant saber, ran the gap of the Valée d'Argelès toward Caunterets and Spain.

Born of the eternal snows and fed by a thousand springs and waterfalls, the swollen Gave tore down this rocky course. As if awed by the nearness of Mary's Grotto, it ran gently and soberly through the town of Lourdes, spread out across the mouth of the valley between the Pic de Jer and the Massabielle. Then it turned in a quick bend to the left, passing through the basilica's long broad shadow, on its way to Pau and the Adour and the sea.

The Shrine gleamed in the sun like a sparkling jewel. Standing in such solitary splendor between the lowly plain and the sky-reaching mountains, it seemed symbolic of the Mother of the Lord, mediating between man on earth and God in heaven. Again I felt the tugging of my soul within me, now deeper, stronger, more insistent. I left.

Riding down on the *funiculaire*, in a few minutes I stood at the bottom of the Mount. I strolled through

the pretty little town with its crooked streets and quaint old houses. Though on the cooler side of the Pyrenees, spring was already in bloom.

From out of the gardens, the spicy odor of pines and the delicate fragrance of flowers drifted lazily over to me on the fluttering gusts of the playful winds. Darting in and out among the burgeoning trees, birds chickled and sang, proclaiming to the world that spring was here.

I crossed the babbling Gave, brimful of the coolness of mountain freshets, by way of the Pont Neuf and sauntered down the beautiful stretch of the Esplanade, flanked on both sides by a row of full-bosomed alders. A well-kept lawn, studded with blossoming flower beds, ran down the center of the Esplanade from the Breton Cross to the monument of the Virgin Encrowned. From here the Esplanade widened out into a spacious square, the Place du Rosaire, providing ample room for the sick and the many thousands of pilgrims who gather here in the summer.

Across the square, facing me, rose "the marble wonder" of Notre Dame de Lourdes—three churches, built one above the other. Below, in front of the great rock Massabielle and on a level with the square, stood the Church of the Rosary, a round edifice with a flat-domed cupola. On top of the projecting abutment of the rock and directly above the Grotto, rested the semicircular, low-ceilinged crypt. And above this towered the elegant and imposing basilica, delicate and graceful in its heaven-aspiring lines.



Starting from the floor of the Place du Rosaire, two ramps, one on either side, leaped up in wide, sweeping bows over flying arches, met at the brow of the Rosary Church, crossed each other, and then continued in a narrower circle around the dome, until they met again and stopped before the portal of the crypt: a tremendous double driveway of two circles, forming a grand approach from the square below to the basilica above, a masterpiece of artistic design welding the three churches together into a wonderfully harmonious architectonic unit of singular beauty.

Walking across the square and through an arch of the right ramp, I found myself alongside the Gave, and in a moment I stood before the Grotto. I caught my breath. Ah!—

Against the deep, dark background of a lozenge-shaped niche in the solid rock, clothed in a garment of spotless white, a sky-blue sash engirdling her waist, hands folded upon her maidenly bosom, with a face of enthralling comeliness, stood the image of Mary Immaculate—sweet, fair, lovely. It seemed like a vision. A vision of glory—so true, so real, so startlingly vivid. It gripped me with a thrill of joy, almost a pang. Slowly I sank to my knees.

*Ave Maria!*

“*Je Suis L’Immaculée Conception.*” In flaming gold letters this legend encircled as a halo the head of the Madonna. “I am the Immaculate Conception.”

With these words she had given to Bernardette and to the world her name. No one of woman born had ever uttered so daring and so true a word. And no one else could, for every child of unhappy Eve sees the light of day with her sin blasted into its soul. Mary only, the blessed among women, "our tainted nature's solitary boast," could identify herself in such an absolute fashion with the privilege of original sinlessness. Like the morning star in the darkness of night, like the glowing rainbow in the cloud-dulled sky, like the snow-white lily in a field of thorns, the Virgin Mother of Christ stands alone among the children of men in the glory of her stainless conception.

The Woman and the Child, promised beneath the closing gates of Eden, given to the world in the fullness of time, beloved of all the passing generations, with a kindness born of her immortal love, deigned to smile upon a sin-laden earth from this forlorn, forgotten spot in the far-away Pyrenees.

The Grotto and Mary's niche still showed forth in all the stark simplicity of their pristine roughness—no embellishment, no enrichment, no adornment. Nature wove her matted thickness of ivy, prinked with flowers, like a tasseled curtain, and hung it over the face of the rock, just as in those memorable days of yore.

And as I gazed up to the niche, the years rolled back before my eyes, and I saw the little shepherd girl here again, lifting a raptured face to the smiling

Madonna. Few words passed the lips of the Fair Lady, but they were winged with a power divine and soared to the farthestmost ends of the earth, drawing the millions of Mary's children from every corner of the globe here to her cherished shrine.

Three score years have hardly elapsed since the miraculous fountain leaped from the rock under the fingers of Bernardette, and already the wonders of its cures are heralded by thousands among the grateful multitudes that rush to its saving waters.

Today all was quiet, silent, almost lonely. Khaki-colored soldiers knelt about, like myself, with awe-filled eyes and love-filled hearts. No sick press around the Grotto and the fountain today. But soon, when the summer sun beats hot upon the hillside, this whole wide space will swarm with litters and stretchers, with the blind and the lame, the deaf and the dumb, the cripples and incurables, thronging to the feet of Mary Mother, Hope of the Sick.

What a sight it is each year! People from every walk of life: Men from the seats of the mighty; laborers from the hovels of the poor; peasants from the fields; merchants from the crowded marts of trade; midinettes from the slave wheels of the factory; grand ladies from the salons of the mansions. All move about in breathless excitement. Suspense fills the air, and souls are keyed to highest tension.

The sick lift mute, pleading, imploring hands to the Madonna. Lips move in silent, feverish, glowing prayer. Eyes fasten themselves in a steady, unblinking



gaze upon Mary's image. Expectancy springs in every heart; confidence; trust, and hope.

One by one they drink of the curing water. One by one they enter the baths. A priest in surplice and stole steps into the midst of the sick gathered before the Grotto, turns to them, arms outstretched and eyes uplifted, and sends out the ringing words that one can hear nowhere but at Lourdes:

"Mary! thou art our hope!"

Clear, penetrating, sonorous, the invocations carry through the tens of thousands who repeat them in a voice of intensest conviction and deepest fervor:

"Mary! thou art our hope!"

"Mary! the one you love is sick!"

"Mary! the one you love is sick!"

"Mary! conceived without sin, pray for our sick!"

"Mary! conceived without sin, pray for our sick!"

"Queen of souls! say but a word, and our sick shall be healed!"

"Queen of souls! say but a word, and our sick shall be healed!"

Then, after a pause:

"Everybody kneel, arms in a cross!"

Tens of thousands kneel, tens of thousands extend their arms. And again that impassioned voice of the *Implorateur* rings up to the sky:

"Jesus! Son of God! Save us; we perish!"

"Jesus! Son of God! Save us; we perish!"

"Jesus! Son of God! Have pity on your children!"

"Jesus! Son of God! Have pity on your children!"

"Jesus! Son of God! Cure them, that they may live!"

"Jesus! Son of God! Cure them, that they may live!"

"Lord! if Thou wilt, Thou canst cure me!"

"Lord! if Thou wilt, Thou canst cure me!"

"Lord! make me walk!"

"Lord! make me walk!"

"Lord! make me see!"

"Lord! make me see!"

"Lord! make me hear!"

"Lord! make me hear!"

"Lord! make me speak!"

"Lord! make me speak!"

Then, with a voice vibrant with excitement, trembling with emotion, loud, insistent, jubilant:

"Hosanna to the Son of David; Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!"

And the crowd takes it up, shouts it, sings it:  
"Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!"

Then sharp, cutting, piercing, like the point of a sword:

"My God! My God! I am cured! Cured! Cured!  
I can walk!"

Somewhere a shrill cry:

"A miracle!"

Dozens shout it:

"A miracle!"

Hundreds roar it:

"A miracle!"

Thousands thunder it:

"A miracle!"

"A miracle!"

"A miracle!"

A veritable frenzy of joy seizes the vast multitude. They push, they jostle, they surge and press around the happy *miraculé*. And the praise of Jesus and Mary floods over the valley and through the mountains and leaps up to heaven in a roaring cataract of song:

"Holy God, we praise Thy name!"

"Ave! Ave! Ave, Maria!"

The sun was sinking fast.

I arose and walked over to the fountain. Cancer and lupus, gangrene and tuberculosis, mashed limbs and structural deformity—all the ills of the flesh have felt its heavenly vigor and vanished at its touch. Like millions before me, I drank deep of its healing freshness.

Over on the Place du Rosaire, upon the runways of the ramps, along the Esplanade, in the narrow streets, down the wide avenue, wherever I looked on my way back to the hotel, groups of doughboys stood or sauntered about. My soul rejoiced and my heart



beat faster at the sight of these fine lads, come to make tomorrow's feast a pilgrimage day for the A. E. F. Many hundreds I saw. Some of my boys, too; all quiet, sober, orderly. Nowhere a harsh tone, a loud voice, a strident call. The sweet and all-pervading peace of Lourdes had placed its gentle touch upon their spirit and softened it almost to tenderness. I saw it in their eyes and heard it in their speech.

Peace! The atmosphere breathed it; the mountains impressed it; the solitude deepened it.

Upon the hills in the west the sunset now burned in crimson fire. Slowly the creeping dusk embraced the earth. The mountains were swathed in rising veils of purple, violet, and jet-black shadows. The heads alone of the snow peaks glowed and gleamed with a hazy flame, red and pink like the heart of a rose. Then the sun sank, the night swept in, and darkness drowned the world.

The twenty-fifth of March. The Feast of the Annunciation. The anniversary of the occasion when the Queen of Heaven, appearing to Bernardette, announced to her: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

The day broke in glory. A burst of golden sunlight crashed across the town and woke it from its slumbers. The mountain tops were ablaze in the slanting glint of the sunrise, flaming gorgeously. Clear as crystal, the morning air flowed in delightful coolness down from the Pyrenees, refreshing as a bath.

I hurried over to the basilica, meeting many dough-





## LOURDES

Top: Soldiers Lining up on the Place du Rosaire  
Bottom: Soldiers Marching into the Rosary Church



boys on the way. More than a dozen chaplains had come to Lourdes, and the previous evening all of us had heard confessions for a number of hours in the crypt. Hundreds upon hundreds of soldiers attended the early Masses and approached the Lord's Table.

The main celebration, though, came later in the morning. After eight o'clock the groups began to pour into the Place du Rosaire from all directions: from the town, from the Grotto, from the triple church, from the surrounding lawns. In half an hour the square was covered with large blotches of olive-drab color.

A bugler mounted the steps of the Rosary Church and lifted his horn to his lips. The sun splashed white rays upon its burnished sides and turned it to gold. Clear as a bell the tones floated across the square, over the fields, and up the hill.

"Assembly!"

Quickly the men gathered at the foot of the steps. In a stentorian voice an officer announced the order of procedure. Another blast of the bugle. Out of the writhing mass of scurrying men two long lines in double file gradually began to emerge across the Place du Rosaire, stretching from the portal of the church down through the Esplanade. A number of sergeants took their position at regular intervals along the length of the column. The officer stepped to the edge of the platform.

"Attention!"

A sharp clicking of heels; a quick straightening of

shoulders; a jerked throwing of heads: they stood at attention.

“Right—*dress!*”

Arms shot up, hands on hips. A movement ran through the lines like a rippling wave: shuffling feet pushed the farther end of the double files slowly down the Esplanade.

“*At ease!*”

A sudden relaxing and a murmurous babbling, as the bodies swayed and moved, still holding their places.

All arrangements made, the column proceeded up the avenue that skirted the left ramp and the basilica. Arriving at the Bishop's palace upon the hill, it halted. Soon the Bishop of Tarbes, Msgr. Schoepfer, accompanied by another bishop and Msgr. J. Connolly, appeared at the door.

With an about-face the column now moved four abreast down the avenue, headed by a cross bearer and two acolytes. Behind the soldiers followed the chaplains: A. Gearhard, who had won the Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery at the front, and W. O'Connor, whose husky voice and suppurating eyes still showed the effect of poison gas, both from my home town; then P. J. Gallagher, who was killed a few days later; also W. Beaudette, A. J. Rawlinson, P. Monahan, F. Le Sage, J. Halligan, B. O'Reilly, D. O'Toole, J. Brady, E. Marsh, J. M. Chevalier, and others. The bishops brought up the rear. The procession marched into the Rosary

Church, the boys in khaki occupying the entire nave.

The Bishop of Tarbes celebrated the Pontifical High Mass, and the boy choristers of Lourdes sang the music. Like the rushing of many waters the deep-toned organ rolled out its majestic harmonies, filling the church with its rumbling volume of sound, while the cultured sopranos of the choir fluted the melodies with remarkable richness and sweetness of tone. How soul-inspiring the music and the ceremonies appeared again to us after the lapse of so many weary months! The Mass over, we all walked down to the Grotto. The Bishop having taken his place at the foot of the Silver Altar, upon request of a French priest in his retinue, I mounted the marble pulpit and recited the rosary with the men. Their strong, manly voices responded in fervent, impressive accents. They knelt there on the pavement, straight as lances, their eyes riveted devoutly upon the image of the Madonna in her niche, while the beads slipped slowly through their fingers.

In its history of sixty-one years, the Shrine had witnessed many a stirring scene. People of every race and land had traveled to Lourdes to pay homage to Our Lady. Scores of cardinals, thousands of bishops, tens of thousands of priests, millions upon millions of the faithful; but never before, with all its colorful pageants, had it beheld a scene like this. American soldiers from far across the world, representing almost every division of the A. E. F., anywhere from Biarritz to St. Nazaire and from Nice to Coblenz, had come



here to render the tribute of their love to the Mother of God on her Feast of the Annunciation. It was A. E. F. Day at Lourdes, and these soldiers were a Regiment of Pilgrims.

After the rosary, the Bishop of Tarbes invoked a blessing upon the bowed heads of the kneeling soldiers, and they then dispersed for the rest of the day.

That night we gathered together again for the evening procession at the Place du Rosaire. The sky throbbed with pulsing stars. The purple vault of the heavens rested upon the motionless shoulders of the Pyrenees and stretched out over our heads like a canopy emblazoned with sparkling gems. A hush lay over the earth. Not a breath stirred the cool, soft air.

Down on the square the black shadows of nearly three thousand soldiers moved about, forming a huge dark block upon the shallow paleness of the ground, hazily white with the dim luster of the starry radiance above. Behind them, several thousand pilgrims from neighboring towns and cities formed in line.

The Bishop arrived. A hurried figure strode rapidly down the column; a quiet command; a brief pause. The silence deepened almost to solidity.

In a flash thousands of little flames shot out as if by magic. Candles were lit, and their tiny flickering lights pierced the darkness with pin points of fire. The stars of heaven seemed to have come down to earth.

The procession started. Scarcely had it gone under

way, when, apparently from nowhere out of the dark, a soldier began to sing. In an instant the others took up the melody and carried it along:

"Mother dear, O pray for me,  
Whilst far from heav'n and thee  
I wander in a fragile bark  
O'er life's tempestuous sea;  
O Virgin Mother, from thy throne,  
So bright in bliss above,  
Protect thy child and cheer my path  
With thy sweet smile of love.

Mother dear, remember me  
And never cease thy care,  
'Till in heaven eternally  
Thy love and bliss I share."

The mighty power of the chorus shattered the stillness of the night, mounted to the sky, flooded the valley, rolled up the mountainside, returning in a million fragments of echoes that dropped down upon us again like a wind-tossed showery spray.

As the last long note died away in a flutter of trailing echoes, the boys began to say the rosary. Firm, strong, devout, the prayer rose and fell: "Hail, Mary, full of grace . . ."

In back of us the mingled voices of the French, men and women, youths and maidens, boys and girls, sounded across and through and over our native American with a music all its own: "*Je vous salue, Marie, pleine de grâce . . .*"

The procession moved solemnly up the one side of the Esplanade, turned at the statue of St. Michael at

the far end, marched down the other, encircled the square, and repeated its course, alternately singing and praying. The sound of the many voices, softened and etherealized through the mellowness of the rich soft night, and the view of these thousands and thousands of flaming tapers aglow in the dark like myriad glimmering fireflies, produced a spectacle so vivid and picturesque that it seemed a living scene from Dante's *Purgatorio*—just shadows, lights, and sounds. Here was heavenly poetry, worthy of the divine singer of Florence!

Completing the second circle, the marchers lined up in front of the Rosary Church, rows on rows far down the square, a shivering sea of fire. Again a pause, deepening the silence into a breathless hush. Of a sudden, like a roaring torrent, crushing in the immensity of its elemental force, vibrant, thrilling, soul-rocking, the profession of faith bounded to the sky:

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary. . ."

Like the rolling billows on a crag-torn coast, the mountains flung back a thunderous "Amen!" Then, as if a breeze had swept the multitude, the candles were quenched; and the darkness rushed down and blotted the world into nothingness.

Thus ended the A. E. F. pilgrimage at Lourdes.



But for me a rare privilege was yet in store the next day. Following the two bishops and Monsignor Connolly, I read Mass at the Silver Altar in the Grotto. All morning I hovered near the Shrine. I could not tear myself away. Lourdes was a little paradise, and the Grotto a corner of heaven. I loved it, and I hated to go. For long spaces of time I sat within its consecrated shadow, just praying, looking, and dreaming. I wished I were a poet, to sing a song of Mary that would stir the soul of the world and waft it on pinions of music up to the foot of her throne in heaven. But, what poet could master so glorious a theme?

### THE SONG OF SONGS

Had God made me our Lady's troubadour,  
The sweetest and the strongest bard among  
The motley harps of all the poets' throng  
Whose throbbing lays the world's wild ear allure,  
And placed the powers of heaven and earth secure  
Within my palm to fashion her a song  
All ravishingly sweet, divinely strong,  
Whose music through the ages would endure:  
I would have plunged the thunder of the gales  
And all the sun's fierce fire into my heart  
To make my love and rapture lava hot,  
And wed it to a million nightingales  
For one world-song beyond all poets' art  
And made our Lady's own Magnificat.

I could stay no longer. One more lingering look at the Madonna in her garment of snowy white, and I departed. But half my heart was left behind.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE BEND IN THE ROAD

Springtime in Verneuil. It came with a burst of water.

The clouds hung over the land in huge, broad masses—dark, thick, heavy; and the rain sheeted from the clouds—sudden, whelming, torrential.

From the *Nivernais* watershed of the Monts du Morvan the rains and melted snows leaped in spouting freshets to the valley below; the freshets ran to the brooks, filling them with violent commotion; the brooks scampered noisily down the hillsides, hurrying on to our little river Aron; and the Aron received them all, growing, swelling, rising constantly day by day.

The sleepy little river became unruly. As the waters flowed in with increasing volume, it fretted and chafed, heaved and tossed restlessly about, angry at being confined in such a shallow-bedded course. Soon the restraining banks could no longer hold back the flood. With a bound the Aron overleaped its banks and flooded the low-bottomed levels of the valley. Higher and higher it rose. It became a frothy, turbulent, lashing stream, snarling and growling at every obstacle in its path. Mounting and spreading, it devoured wide stretches of meadow, uprooted the

bushes, half climbed the trees, swept over the high embankment of the valley road, tore and clawed at the bridge posts, rushing and roaring along like a drunken maniac bent on destruction. Our peaceful valley became a boiling lake of wild, savage, swirling floods.

Then, as quick as they came, the waters subsided. The clouds drew together, heaped themselves upon one another, shifted about, widened away, and through the gaping fringes of their tattered edges the sun sent piercing shafts of brilliant light upon the rain-drenched, mud-clogged face of the earth. Soon the heavens shone forth in larger and larger expanses of deep blue, and the clouds sailed white and clean through the crystal dome like balls of uncombed wool puffed up to enormous size.

The sun beat gently down upon the land, and the winds blew dreamily over the hills. Like a caress, the warmth of the south wind stroked the brown cheeks of the fields, coaxing the tender green out of the soil and the trees. The meadows became luscious with sprouting grass, and the hedges blossomed snow-white.

High up on the hilltops the farmers furrowed the soil, trudging wearily behind the yoke of oxen, sharply outlined against the pale-blue horizon, as if plowing the very edge of the sky. Down in the valley the Aron dragged itself along again in its old, customary bed, slow and lazy, dozing the time away, tired and exhausted from its recent rampage. And along the line of its shore, chatting peasant women knelt, dipped



their laundry into the water, pulled it out upon a board, and slapped it lustily with a wooden paddle.

Spring had come to Verneuil indeed.

The mud in the camp vanished more and more, and in its stead appeared large gray spots of earth, sun-baked and dusty. Every available level space was turned into a drill ground. Since the beginning of March the men hurried out after working hours to learn their elementary lessons of military movements. Our motor mechanics had to be converted into dough-boys. No more civilians in a soldier's uniform. The "old home guard" easiness of bearing had to make way for snap and precision. The drill sergeant came back into his rights again. Loud, raucous commands echoed up and down the slopes of 772.

"Column—*march!*"

"Hep!—Hep!"

"Wake up there! Sleep tonight!"

"Hep!—Hep!"

"Hey, there, Daddy-Long-Legs! Lift up those clod-hoppers of yours!"

"Hep!—Hep!"

"Snap into it now! Come on!"

"Hep!—Hep!"

"Hands down, you! Tickle that cootie some other time!"

"Hep!—Hep!"

"Pep it up, boys! Pep it up!"

"Hep!—Hep!"

"Hold that line. It's as crooked as spaghetti! Are you cross-eyed?

"Hep!—Hep!

"Hep!—Hep!

"Up with your head! Out with your chest!

"Hep!—Hep!

"Straighten your back, there! Want a broomstick down your rubber-hose spine?

"Hep!—Hep!

"Don't slouch! Throw out your dogs!

"Now you're going! Keep it up!

"Hep!—Hep!

"Attaboy! You'll be a soldier yet!

"Hep!—Hep!

"Fifth Avenue—next year!

"Hep!—Hep!

"Hep!—Hep!

"Hep!—Hep!

"Company-y-y-y-y-y — *halt!*"

They stopped, panting, sweating, tired. Dust lay on their uniforms; dust streaked their faces; dust smeared their mouths; dust bit their tongues and their noses and their throats. But it had to be. No soldier, without drill; and no going home, without being a soldier. So they bent their bodies to the added strain.

Thus it went on for a month. In and out, right and left, back and forth, in squares and circles, the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching feet slammed the earth, beating the ear with the heavy, monotonous thud of five thousand pairs of slogging shoes. They needed

little encouragement to perfect their precision of movement. The Colonel had supplied them with an all-powerful motive. He had given his promise that he would try to have General Pershing come to Verneuil, to inspect the men and the shops personally. And he felt reasonably sure that he might be able to persuade the Commander-in-Chief to permit the organization to go to the port of debarkation without the necessity of an agonizing stopover in a concentration camp like Le Mans.

"When are we going home, Father?"

Since Christmas I had been asked this question hundreds of times by the lads of the camp. And every day, when I made my customary rounds through the hospital visiting the sick, a dozen eager faces would turn to me with the same, everlasting, burning query. One day, as I entered a ward, a loud voice greeted me:

"Say, Father, we're going home soon! No doubt about it now!"

"Yes? What makes you so sure?"

"Why, the welfare boys here came through the hospital yesterday and gave each one of us a package of cigarettes free, gratis, for nothing! Just think of it!"

"Well, I don't know about that. But I can give you a better reason."

"What's that?"

"General Pershing is coming to inspect the troops."

"No! When?"



"April 1."

"Hurrah for Black Jack!"

The day arrived. The camp buzzed with excitement. Officers restless, fidgety, short of word. Men hurrying about, scraping shoes, adjusting spirals, sharpening, sewing, cleaning, brushing, dusting. Everything spick and span. Not a loose button. Nowhere a speck of dirt. Dressed for parade.

The review took place before the Court du Faye's château, on the lawn of the hill overlooking the shops in the valley. After dinner, the men assembled. At two o'clock the various unit detachments marched over to the inspection ground, coming in from different points, four abreast, erect, alert, snappy, with sprightly step and swinging gait. They really had the appearance of actual dragoons now. Though not a finished product like soldiers of the line, they gave a splendid impression as they marched over the field and took their position in mass formation.

The soft lawn was crisscrossed with long, regular streaks in every direction, as if a thousand double teams of horses had trodden a complicated course over the delicate green of the sod. We were ready. A look-out had been posted down the road, to watch for the General's automobile coming from Nevers. At four o'clock, after sighting it, a motorcycle with side-car roared down the driveway, made a sharp curve on two wheels, and stopped in front of Colonel Hege-

man. An officer jumped out of the sidecar, stepped up, saluted, reported. The blast of a bugle—sharp, shrill, cutting. Everybody in position.

The Colonel wheeled around: "Regiment—*attention!*"

The majors about-faced to their units: "Battalion—*attention!*"

The captains snapped out the command: "Company—*attention!*"

The sergeants barked: "Squads—*attention!*"

Five thousand men stood as one. A long, tense wait. Silence.

Now! The purring sound of a smoothly running, powerful motor. A large car, whizzing around the corner of the château. General Pershing! The Commander-in-Chief!

He stepped out of the car. His aides followed. The General walked briskly over to where Colonel Hegeman stood at the head of his staff. They faced each other. Up went the Colonel's hand in salute. Then the General's. Both stood for a moment, straight, silent, motionless.

The General dropped his hand. The next instant a smile spread over his face. He took a step forward: General Pershing and Colonel Hegeman gripped hands and exchanged a few words.

Then, without delay, began the inspection of the troops. It started with Headquarters Staff—about twenty officers. The General walked down their front.

From there he went with rapid strides to the P. W. E. Company. These men were battle troops. Rigid as stone, straight as arrows, perfect in line, they stood with rifles grounded, while the Army Chief passed through their ranks.

We were next. My place was with the 302 Unit Staff. Major Rosemere stood at attention in front, his breath blowing hard; I could hear it hiss through his teeth. But the General did not inspect our staff.

Finished with the Escort Company, he strode quickly and methodically down the double files of our men. Not a sound broke the stillness of this quiet afternoon. Nowhere a movement, nowhere a stir, except for the forms of General Pershing and his aides stepping up and down, up and down, up and down. The silence was oppressive, charged, thick, fraught with the concentrated attention of five thousand bodies and minds. The time, though short, seemed interminable.

At last the review was over. The officers and men broke ranks and began crowding to the front, for the Commander-in-Chief intended to address a few words to them. A number of soldiers carried a small platform upon the lawn. The General mounted it, patiently waiting there for the men to come up from the farther end of the field.

Standing there about ten feet away, directly in front of General Pershing, I obtained a good view of the man. There was nothing distinctive in his uni-



form; from spurred boots to dresscap, he looked like any other officer. But he fairly radiated dignity and power in a quiet unobtrusive manner.

His spare, well-knit body gracefully poised upon his left foot; his right foot a little to the front and set at a divergent angle; arms akimbo, his right hand plunged into his trouser pocket, and his left, clasping his gloves, held at his side, with the thumb gripping the corner of the pocket; his wide shoulders squared back; his head, with its broad forehead, thrown up; his strongly modeled jaw, revealing his force of personality and spirit of determination, thrust forward; his lean face, with its close-cropped mustache, firm and immobile; his clear eyes, quick in their penetrating glances, roving steadily over the field: standing thus, General Pershing cut a remarkably dashing figure. It was an entirely unconscious pose; but striking, characteristic, statuesque: worthy to be sculptured into bronze or marble.

Now he spoke, clear, loud, distinct. In simple and unadorned language he briefly recalled America's coming to Europe, the difficulty in maintaining communications between base and front, the courage and sacrifice of the soldiers smashing their way to victory. In this ultimate achievement the Service of Supplies and the Motor Transport were a very important factor. Every department of the Army deserves credit for bringing about the final result, and all share in the glory of winning the war. The General expressed his sincere appreciation and thanks for the splendid work



General John J. Pershing, after inspecting troops





performed by the officers and men of this Motor Transport Reconstruction Park and urged them to continue to put forth their best efforts as long as their services would be required.

With that he closed. A loud, long, ringing applause followed his words. Stepping down from the platform, he engaged in conversation with the Colonel.

One of the nurses, who had been standing nearby, came up to me, camera in hand. "Father, is there any chance of taking a picture of General Pershing?"

"Certainly. Go right to him and take it."

"Oh, I'm afraid! What will he say?"

"What *can* he say? He surely would not say anything harsh to a nice nurse, would he?"

"Quit your kidding! I mean it."

"So do I. Go ahead!"

"I haven't the nerve."

"Well, then I'll go with you. Come."

I felt a little diffident myself. We walked over. For a moment the General stood alone, and both of us stepped up to him, the nurse holding her camera in position. I looked at the General, to see how he would take it. He noticed us, smiled, and said:

"Another battery of machine guns?"

I took courage. "General, would you mind posing for this little nurse? She's mightily scared of you."

He laughed, turned, faced the camera, and stood still, flashing his genial smile. The picture taken, he walked over and shook hands with us, chatting for a

time. Presently he was called away; and the nurse heaved a glad sigh, trained her beaming eyes upon me, and said with a rapture-thrilled voice: "Oh! Isn't he glorious?"

And soberly I affirmed: "He sure is!"

Everybody returned to the camp, and soon the field was deserted. Only the long, four-lined streaks across the lawn remained where the feet of five thousand soldiers had marched.

That evening the shops were ablaze with light and teeming with activity. At seven o'clock General Pershing inspected the plant. Each man was at his post, giving a war-time demonstration of motor repair work.

Every wheel hummed a welcome and every tool whanged a greeting, as the Commander-in-Chief went from shop to shop. The oxyacetylene torches spat with blue tongues of fire, their knives of flame cleaving apart or knitting together the broken vitals of disabled motors. Chains clanked and tackles squeaked, as trucks swung heavily from place to place. Lathes whirred, precision machines droned, and drill presses screeched, while their hardened teeth bit their way along and through the tempered steel. Sputtering and hissing, little lava streams of molten brass and aluminum sizzled into molds, fashioning delicate parts of automobiles. The forges blazed and belched, and the power hammers thundered crashingly, pounding the white-hot steel into unwilling

forms. Machine saws shrilled a whining path through seasoned timber, shaping wheels and spokes and bodies. In striking contrast to all this noise and turmoil of shopwork, the electrolytic gas plant silently generated its oxygen and hydrogen and forced the product into tanks and drums.

General Pershing, greatly impressed, did not hesitate to show his admiration and satisfaction at the magnitude of the plant, the variety of its operations, the completeness of its equipment, and the skill of its personnel.

The inspection over, the official party went back to headquarters; and here a simple but dramatic ceremony took place, that climaxed the visit of General Pershing to our camp. The officers of the Park had already assembled. When the Commander-in-Chief entered, we all stood at attention and saluted. After a brief pause one of his aides-de-camp motioned to the Colonel:

"Colonel Harry Hegeman!"

The Colonel stepped forward. General Pershing then read the citation, conferring the Distinguished Service Medal upon him in the name of the President of the United States—

". . . for exceptionally meritorious and distinguished services. With technical skill and great energy he organized a large force of trained workmen for the repair of motor transports. He restored to service a great mass of accumulated dead transportation of all kinds and types, and kept in operation much transpor-



tation by timely repair. By his untiring efforts, the motor transportation was maintained at such a standard as to become an important factor in the successes achieved by the American troops."

The aide opened an exquisite jewelry case and extended it to the General, who took the D. S. M. from it, stepped up to Colonel Hegeman, and said:

"Colonel, it affords me great personal pleasure to confer upon you this decoration in the name of the President."

He then pinned the medal upon his breast and shook his hand in congratulation. The Colonel was visibly affected. In a voice shaking with emotion he replied:

"Thank you, General. I accept it in the name of the officers and men of this command. I desire the officers and men to know that without their untiring efforts such an honor would never have come to me. It is to them that the credit for the great success of these works is due. To them my deepest thoughts and most sincere words of appreciation are given."

The Colonel saluted and stepped back, while everybody pressed closer and congratulated him upon the great and unusual honor he had just received. He accepted our felicitations with touching modesty.

We felt very proud of our C. O. in this inspiring moment. He had been awarded the highest decoration any soldier can obtain, except for bravery in action on the battle field, in recognition of an achievement quite unparalleled in military operations. And we

felt very proud of him, too, for his noble and unselfish acknowledgment that the efforts of the officers and men under his command made possible his being so honored. We saw in this award a glowing tribute to every drill press, lathe, and forge; unstinting recognition of the toil of every pair of calloused and grimy hands; mighty praise for the faithfulness and loyalty of every heart. The citation of our C. O. contained glory for all of us. The shadow of the Colonel's D. S. M. fell upon the breast of every soldier in camp, from the lieutenant colonels down to the lowliest private.

Our camp had, indeed, been signally honored this day.

From headquarters we all repaired to the camp theater, where the "Over There Theater League" were to put on the play "Under Cover." The General and his party occupied the places of honor, while the officers and soldiers of the Park filled the remaining space from wall to wall.

A spirit of joyousness surged through the assembled men. To have the Chief of the whole Army in our midst as a soldier among soldiers was by far the grandest occasion our camp had ever been privileged to witness. Pride of service welled high in every heart. A happy babbling of voices rippled along the benches and never ceased until the curtain rose on the show.

The players, Broadway professionals, gave a perfectly enjoyable performance. During one of the intermissions, an unexpected incident happened that

revealed the innermost feeling of these war-weary men to the General. From somewhere in the crowd a voice boomed the beginning of a soldier song that I had heard dozens of times in the last few months. In a flash over two thousand voices burst out into a swelling chorus:

I want to go home!

I want to go home!

The war is over and I am glad;

I want to see mother and dad.

I want to go home!

I want to go home!

O my!

I don't want to die,

I want to — go home!

They sang it with a roaring humor and a rollicking boisterousness that shivered the rafters above our heads. But, as always before, now also I could detect that sweet-sad lingering undertone of wistfulness, which registered their homesick feeling and which they never quite managed to hide and suppress while singing this simple, homely melody. Their souls ached, even though they laughed aloud.

I looked at the General during the progress of the song. He turned his head aside to catch the words. Then a slow smile broadened over his features; it seemed to me that *he* was homesick, too! The soldiers had sent a message to their Chief which he could not misconstrue; and I am sure he understood.

After the show the Colonel invited his distin-



guished guest to the Officers' Club at the château, where a dance with the nurses had been arranged in honor of the occasion. He accepted graciously.

While at the club, we were informed between dances to line up and be presented personally to the General. A hitch of the trousers, a pull on the blouse, a tug at the belt—we stood in line. One by one the officers filed past. The Colonel, standing to the General's left, introduced the officer by name. The General shook hands with each, greeting him with a pleasant "Glad to meet you."

My turn came. The introduction made and the conventional greetings exchanged, I was about to move on when a gesture from General Pershing stopped me.

"And how's the Chaplain?"

"Very well, General, thank you."

"Have you been long in this camp?"

"Since October second, sir."

"And how do you find conditions here, Chaplain?"

"All in all, very good, sir."

"Much dissatisfaction among the troops?"

"Somewhat restless, General, but not really dissatisfied. They are a rather homesick lot. However, they know they have a definite amount of work to do, and they are willing to see it through."

"Have you had good success with the men in your own line of work, Chaplain?"

"That is a rather embarrassing question to answer personally, General. I am afraid I'll have to let the

Colonel here answer for me and trust to his mercy in doing it."

The General laughed, the Colonel chuckled, and I smiled.

"How is the morale of the men?"

"In the main, good. Of course, there are infractions of discipline; but only of a minor character."

The Colonel nodded assent.

"And their morals?"

"Well, in and around the camp, conditions are good, thanks to the solicitude of the camp authorities. But I do think, General, that the furloughs into leave areas are having a harmful effect upon many of the soldiers. I believe the sooner they all get back to their homes the better it will be for everybody."

"We are trying to send them home as soon as we can. All right, Chaplain."

I walked on and the rest were introduced. The General stayed a little while longer and then made preparations to depart. The officers assembled at the door, and as he passed through the room, we all stood at attention, hand in salute. The General lifted his finger tips to his cap.

"Good-by, gentlemen."

"Good-by, General."

He stepped outside and entered his car. A shift of gears, a streak of shadows, a rumble of echoes—and then the silence of the night.

General Pershing had made his visit to Verneuil.

Our shops became a show place.

Many English, French, and American notables visited the Park and made a tour of the plant.

Major General James G. Harbord, Commanding General of the S. O. S. arrived one day, bringing with him Ambassador Davis of England; Major General Sir H. D. Parsons, Director Engineering and Ordnance Supplies; Major General Traver, Director of Supplies and Mechanical Transportation; Q. M. General, Sir John Cowans; and Lord Burnham, editor of the London Daily Telegraph. Accompanying the General were Major General John Biddle, C. O. Base Section No. 3, and Brigadier General Jadwin, Director of Construction and Forestry.

The inspection of the shops proved to be a revelation to the party; they commented upon the intense interest displayed everywhere by the men.

Lieutenant General J. Hunter Liggett, together with his corps, division and brigade commanders and high-ranking staff officers of the First Army, came by special train and were taken through the shops. Of the thirty who comprised the official party, twenty were Major or Brigadier Generals. Among them were Major Generals J. P. Dickman, G. H. Cameron, C. P. Summerall, R. L. Bullard, J. L. Hines, J. A. Lejeune, and E. Wittenmyer.

General Liggett and staff were highly pleased with what they saw and offered congratulations to all responsible for the work which had been done here. Being all line officers, they were greatly surprised at



the size of the shops and had no idea that a place of such extent and facilities existed in the A. E. F.

On another occasion, General Harbord served as escort to a group of eminent French Army officers, showing them what American ingenuity and efficiency had accomplished on French soil. Among his guests were Field Marshal H. P. Petain, second-highest ranking officer in the French Army; General de Noel Castelnau, commanding the group of the Armies of the East; General P. Maistre, commanding the group of the Armies of the Center; General J. M. Degoutte, commanding the group of the Armies of Flanders; General F. G. Herr, commanding Fourth Corps; General Toulorge, commanding Fifth Corps; General Hely d'Oissel, commanding Eighth Corps.

In true French style, these military leaders and the members of their entourage gave frequent expression to their surprise by highly emotional phrases and exclamations. To them it seemed a mystery how American soldiers could erect such a plant and bring it to such a high degree of efficiency and accomplishment in so short a time.

Another memorable day was April 19, when Secretary of War Newton D. Baker and fifteen members of Congress favored Verneuil with their presence and visited the shops.

Naturally, it afforded the officers and soldiers of our Park intense satisfaction to see their work appreciated and their accomplishments praised. But they were yearning for something else now. Their hearts

were far away over the waters. General Pershing's review had raised their hope of a speedy return higher than ever. They lived but for the day when they could put their tools aside and say farewell to "Death Valley."

As one lad put it: "I'm not anxious to get a 'cross de guerre'; all I want is to get 'a-cross de ocean!'"

But the realization of this hope seemed lost in the far and hazy distance. All went on as usual. Work and drill. Work and drill. Energies began to flag; spirits became depressed; nerves were taut. Waiting was worse than war. Everybody had to encourage everybody else.

"Heads up, men! Heads up!

"We've got to see this thing through!

"It won't be long now!

"It has to be done!

"The sooner we finish, the sooner we go!

"It can't last forever!

"We're no pikers; on with the racket!

"Soon we'll be home!

"All together now!

"Let's go!"

In February there were approximately 15,000 disabled motor vehicles in the A. E. F., spread all the way from Bordeaux to Coblenz, which had to be overhauled, rebuilt, and reclaimed. Of these, the major repair cases found their way ultimately to Verneuil, the cars to be reconstructed or junked. We were flooded with salvage.

At the end of March our Park had about 230 vehicles that could be repaired for less than 30 per cent of the original cost; and also about 2,180 vehicles where the cost of repair would be prohibitive. On April 12, our salvage included 736 heavy trucks, 928 light trucks, 114 ambulances, 322 automobiles, 294 motorcycles, and 86 trailers.

Up to April, the combined efforts of all departments in our shops had effected repairs on 5,141 trucks, 1,970 automobiles, 357 ambulances, 4,622 motorcycles, 1,763 bicycles, and 5,788 animal-drawn vehicles, besides 14,383 miscellaneous repair jobs of all kinds for other branches of the service. Also, 718,573 parts of motor vehicles and 71,425 parts of animal-drawn vehicles had been reclaimed and returned to stock. For these repairs, the men had manufactured 505,455 automobile repair parts and 79,355 parts for other services. These are mere figures, and in no way do they indicate the enormous amount of work and the vast difficulties encountered in reconstructing the vehicles damaged and wrecked by the ravages of war. Emergency conditions arose that taxed the ability and resourcefulness of the organization to the utmost; but our men rose gloriously to the occasion. When, at a critical period in the military operations, the steering arms of trucks began to break like pipe stems all over the A. E. F., our shops turned out 500 of these in five days after they undertook the job; in the neighborhood of 25,000 of these arms had been made at the Park in the course of time.



So, too, the manufacture of 2,500 Ford commutators, placing 2,500 Ford ambulances into service, was accomplished at the rate of 500 every three days and involved the making up from raw stock of about 55,000 parts. All in all, during the eleven months at Verneuil, 14,619 freight carloads had been received and unloaded, and 2,307 were loaded out.

And so the work continued. The salvage dwindled more and more under the driving labor of the men, the 30-per-cent cost margin simplifying matters considerably. Days passed, weeks dragged on, April gave place to May; and still no news of departure. But the end now seemed in sight. The men breathed easier, and their hearts beat lighter. And then, toward the middle of May, the word came, and flashed from mouth to mouth, and swept over the camp like a wildfire, a whirlwind, a cyclone:

*"We're going home!"*

Screaming, yelling, singing, whistling, laughing; they slapped each other on the back and hit one another on the head. They danced and jigged—a horde of madmen, insane with joy. No one knew just when; but who cared? Two, three, four weeks: what difference did it make? It was certain! It was soon! At last!

These men had been in France for nearly a year and a half, dedicated to the cause of their country, eager to help win the war, performing hard, prosaic, drudging labor, surrounded by a million discomforts, in a land of rain and mud. But their hearts were fired

with a far-off vision. Down at the end of the long, long trail they saw a bend in the road, and around the bend—home!

This vision of home sweetened all the bitterness of hardship and pain. Every soldier's eye looked dreamily into the future, to the day he would walk down the street with a jaunty step and fly to the welcoming arms of those he loved.

And now—they had turned the bend.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LADY WITH THE LAMP

"Baggage! Baggage! Baggage!"

Loud and imperious the cry ran through our barracks on the morning of May 21. It was the day of departure from Verneuil. We were going home.

"Your baggage ready, Father?"

"Yes, boys. Here it is. Locker and bedding roll."

"Whew! What's in your locker? A ton of gold bricks you're trying to smuggle into the States? That'll never do, Father!"

"Just souvenirs, Jack."

"Hm. We'll have to charge you excess baggage. Where's your Fairbanks scale, Ted?"

Ted looked puzzled, scratched his head, cogitated deeply, and replied: "Gosh, Jack, I left it home on the piano!"

"On the piano! Such a forgetful workingman! Now what'll we do?"

Ted rubbed his finger thoughtfully along his big nose for a few seconds. Then a broad smile broke over his face.

"I got it, Jack. We'll take the whole kaboodle back to the States with us and weigh it there. How's that?"



"Oh, your mother has a bright boy, Ted! Won't she be glad to see you again! All right, give me a lift."

They carried it out to the truck.

"Now, then. Alley-oop! One—two—there she is! Yo-ho! And a bottle of rum!"

"All aboard for Broadway!"

"Baggage! Baggage! Baggage!—Next!"

My baggage attended to, I took a stroll across the valley to our cemetery on the hill. I could not leave without paying my last respects to those we had to leave behind.

Gentle hands had taken good care of the graves. Flowers bloomed upon each patch of sod, and a wreath of beadwork graced the single crosses.

How stark these crosses stood! White, with black lettering. Like soldiers, in mute and motionless attention. But the soldiers lay asleep below, in their little bivouacs of death, never to awaken until the Day of Doom.

There might have been more; and yet, each one, one too many! Here lay poor J., who did not want to die; and here smiling G., who was willing to go. And here, stout-hearted E. S. He had been such a game fighter to the end; as brave as any soldier in the trenches. Double pneumonia, that turned into empyema. Too weak to take ether, the doctors had cut through his side while he was fully conscious; and he merely gasped and stood it. Then they inserted a

long rubber tube, to drain the pus away from his lungs. As I stepped up to the foot of his bed, he raised his thin, frail hand in salute to his pallid brow and smiled.

"Morning!—Father!"

"Good morning, E. How do you feel?"

"Fine.—Strong—like pulling—down steel—buildings!"

And he beamed a twisted smile between the sharp spasms of his painful breathing.

"Doctor—got your—windshield—up?"

"Yes, E. Why?"

"I've—got to—cough."

"All right. Cough; but easy now!"

And E. coughed. The pus shot out in a long streak five feet away and blotched an ugly smear upon the floor.

"There.—Not so—bad—was it?"

"You're doing fine, E."

"Sure—Doc."

But he died; and two months ago I had put him to rest here in our cemetery. And with him, lay more than a score of others in neat, clean, orderly graves.

The grave of one, though, differed from the others. His cross was slightly awry. And no sod above him; only crude lumps of fresh earth. The last lad I had buried; just yesterday afternoon, the day before leaving for home! He had heard the good news; had pictured his home; had rejoiced in his going. Then a balking truck had pinned him against a fence, causing

internal injuries. And now he, too, slept the long sleep.

I knelt down and bowed my head.

"Our Father, Who art in Heaven. . ."

*"Requiem aeternam. . ."*

Rest to their ashes; peace to their souls!

I stood up, and with a last salute I saluted my dead comrades. And as I did so, it seemed to me that shadowy hands went slowly to shadowy heads.

These would stay, though we would leave. Dead sentinels, watching over a dead camp. Our Silent Guard.

"Au revoir, my Boys! Au revoir!"

The Colonel and a number of officers, together with a few hundred men, were to remain in camp for a short while longer, to close up the affairs of the Park. And a few patients in the hospital, too, could not travel. These I had to see.

With a heavy heart I stepped into the ward. There they were, dispirited, silent, morose. Two or three were lying down, eyes fixed on the ceiling; the others, sitting on the edge of the bed, held their chins in their cupped hands.

"Good morning, buddies."

They looked up.

"Good morning, Father."

"I came to say good-by, boys. I know how you feel, and I'm immensely sorry that you can't come along today. But, cheerio! It will be but a very short time, and then you'll be with us."



For a moment no one said a word. Then one spoke up:

"It's a tough break of luck, that's all."

One other lad flung himself on his back and threw his hands over his face. A sob, a groan; then silence. The nurse patted him on the shoulder and said:

"We'll stick it out to the end, won't we? We'll get home sometime." But her voice quivered and her eyelids fluttered suspiciously. With a quick movement she turned to the window and looked out. Her heart was aching, too.

"So long, boys. So long, nurse. See you in Brest."

The men waved a slow good-by with their hands. The nurse never moved. I walked out.

Clamor and commotion reigned on the old hill. Men swarmed over it like ants. Loud talk, shouts, songs, commands. Men rushed in and out the barracks, pushing, bumping, stepping aside. Rubbish and accumulated odds and ends were carried out and thrown upon piles to be burned. Barrack bags were tied and tossed onto the waiting trucks.

In front of a section of barracks stood a long column of soldiers, packs on their backs. An officer faced them.

"Company—attention!"

"Forward—march!"

How those boys marched! Their faces bright; their eyes clear; their bodies erect; their feet pounding the earth with a lusty step. They swung down the road,

raising a cloud of dust, dust that tasted sweet in their mouths today. And as their hobnails slapped the earth on the way to the train, each thud beat out the song of their soldier heart:

“Home—home—home—home!”

They disappeared in the valley, and others followed them on the way. Column after column marched along, with a smile and a laugh and a melody. After awhile the hill became quiet; as if its soul had fled, leaving but the ghost of its former self to flit about aimlessly through the empty barracks. Even the flag drooped heavily from its staff.

But down near the railroad tracks life pulsed with tingling quickness. The men were entraining. Calls, questions, orders—thick and fast they flew through the air. Officers walked down the rails with long, loping strides, seeking the places for their troops. Sergeants ran to and fro, shouting leather-lunged directions to their corporals. Corporals snapped commands in sharp, incisive tones to their squads. And then, the short, shuffling steps of soldiers marching in close formation. Finally all were assigned.

The train seemed of interminable length; the distant end faded away into a mere line. Forty or fifty cars at least. The officers occupied coaches; the troops rode in box cars—“Side-Door Pullmans,” as the boys called them. These cars were exceptionally large. Every one had two side doors and three barred windows on each side; or one door and six windows. Really horse cars; that was plain to see. Some lads

peered through the bars of the windows, like prisoners in a jail; others crowded around the large doors; the more fortunate ones sat on the threshold, their feet dangling comfortably outside. Sergeants stood before each door, keeping the men in their respective cars.

Noon came. The German prisoners lined up a short distance to one side, to be escorted back to their stockade for mess. They stood in formation, casting envious and home-hungry glances over toward our train. Someone shouted:

"Good-by, Heinie! Meet ya again in the next war! Ta—ta!"

Now an officer walked hurriedly down the tracks, giving orders to the sergeants as he passed along. Each sergeant turned to his contingent:

"All out for chow! And make it snappy, men. We want to *parti tout de suite!*"

In a few seconds the train had disgorged its human freight and pell-mell the troops rushed up the road to the nearby mess hall, for their last meal in the Lone Star Cafe. Never had I known soldiers to eat such a hasty dinner. In half an hour they were back.

Colonel Hegeman and the remaining members of his staff came to see us off. His face wore a big, hearty smile. He wished us all a good journey and shook hands in farewell with the officers.

"All aboard!"

A long, shrill whistle. From the farther end of the train down to the officers' coach the sergeants gave their signal and hopped up through the door into their



car. Another signal and another whistle. Then slowly, languidly, laboriously the huge serpent began to crawl along the shining rails. A roaring cheer from thousands of happy throats. A waving of many hands. We were going!

The sunlight flashed us a last glimpse of the shops, the yards, the camp, the flag: and Verneuil vanished. The Motor Transport Reconstruction Park was a thing of the past, and 772 a memory!

Farewell, old hill, scene of so many sorrows and joys!

Farewell.

The engine puffed and tugged, straining like a coolie with the burden of its load. Little by little it gathered speed, and soon we were bowling merrily along.

No stations; no stops. Along the Loire valley; through the American Engineers' cut-off, escaping Nevers; then west toward the coast and the sea. All afternoon, villages and hamlets, farms and countryside, dressed in all the splendor of a color-appareled May, saw us from a distance, hailed us in passing, and slipped from view.

Bourges, the Beautiful! A dream of magic it rose before us, bathed in golden glory, flaming in the rose-red fires of sunset, like a precious jewel beneath the crystal glass of the deep-blue sky.

Then the night came on—soft, pure, serene. Dancing shadows outside. Flickering lights. In our

coach the conversation lagged, drooped, died. Huddled forms in the darkness; bobbing heads against the side supports; quiet breathing. And through it all, the constant rumbling of the train.

"Clack-clack, clack-clack, clack-clack," murmured the wheels to the rails. To my ears it was music, a lullaby, the song of home and mother! I fell asleep.

The sunlight woke me in the morning. For a drowsy moment I could not locate myself. Ah, yes, in the train. On the way to the port. Going home! Now I was fully awake. My limbs felt stiff, cramped, muscle-sore.

I looked at the other officers in my compartment. One occupied himself with massaging his neck; another went through a shaky sort of calisthenics, balancing himself with the movement of the coach; a third snored noisily; the other two glanced out of the window, tired and bored.

"Have we passed Tours?" I asked.

"Awhile ago," one answered, squeezing the words out with difficulty between two prodigious yawns.

The one performing his calisthenics gave a few more twists to his arms, touched his toes with his finger tips ten times, and sat down.

"So. Now that I'm through with my morning exercise, had my cold shower, walked my pre-prandial mile, and read the daily paper, there comes the all-important question of the army: When do we eat?"

"Try the dining car," someone suggested.

"That reminds me," I said; "I've got something."

"Father," one cried out in amazement, "don't tell us you've got something to *eat*!"

"It's something to eat all right; but I don't know whether you care for it."

I reached up to the rack above the seat and took down a large paper box. Gently I pried open the cover and lifted it back. Everybody bent toward me and peered into it. Five voices exclaimed at once:

"Gum drops!"

"Father, you're a life-saver!"

"No supper; no breakfast; who cares? We've got gum drops!"

And so we sat there, munching the candy I had brought along. The confection served as a fair substitute for the missing "iron rations" of the army. It disappeared rapidly among the six of us.

After awhile I stood up and gazed at the scenery. The wind barely stirred. Fields dozed in the warmth of the sun. Cows rested beneath the trees, solemnly chewing their cud. Farms blinked drowsily in the brilliant light. Here and there a château lifted its head above the poplars, only to fall back again in its century-old sleepiness. Brooks and rivers flowed past with leisure, going nowhere and taking ages to get there. Peasants led their plodding oxen along the road, setting one tired foot grudgingly ahead of the other.

Time droned by on leaden wings. France was old and had an old-world patience. But we—we wanted speed, speed! For we were young, and going home, and hungry! Here nothing hurried. Even our train



lumbered with slow-motion laziness down the glistening tracks!

About one o'clock in the afternoon every officer and soldier was rudely shocked into sudden alertness. Our train stopped; and there, to our right and a short distance away, we saw a veritable sea of tents and barracks. This could not be Brest.

A single question flew from mouth to mouth from the far end of the train up to the officers: "What is it?"

And the answer traveled back from the head coach down the full length of the box cars like a flash of lightning: "Le Mans."

"Le Mans! Le Mans!" The word echoed along and produced an expression of blank terror upon every face. The concentration camp of Le Mans! Was this the end of our journey? The place where they prepared you for the return to the States, by drilling you until your arms dropped off, and marching you until your feet wore off up to the ankles? Not a soul moved. The men sat or stood in the doorways of the cars, as if frozen to ice. The hidden thought was plain in every face. They had been promised to be routed straight through to Brest, and now they landed at Le Mans: it seemed a scurvy army trick.

Soon, though, an officer hurried down the line and told the men that they might get out; but they were to stay in the immediate vicinity of the train, because we would resume the journey after a short stop. Everybody jumped to the ground. Some walked

about; others hopped up and down; many ran back and forth: anything, to ease the stiffened limbs.

The men continued to eye the cantonment with suspicion. They felt none too sure now about the prospect of going to Brest. Two hundred thousand soldiers were quartered in this concentration camp, and our boys feared that any moment they would be ordered to shoulder their packs and march in. You never can tell in the army.

An hour passed. And another. The men became fidgety. What's holding us up? Are we really going ahead? No one knew. Then came the glad command:

"All aboard!"

The soldiers scrambled into the cars like monkeys. The train moved and there was a long, loud shout of glee! An M.P. stood near the tracks, watching the train go slowly by. Someone cried out:

"Who won the war?"

A thousand voices answered:

"The M.P.'s!"

"Who?"

"The M.P.'s!"

"What should they get for it?"

"The jug!"

Everybody laughed. The M.P. merely grinned. Le Mans disappeared.

Again the dragging, monotonous, bone-aching ride. Out toward the west and the lowering sun. No one cared to look at the scenery: beauty holds no appeal, when the stomach is famished. We simply talked;

talked incessantly; talked on anything; talked of everything: from stars to cooties, from prohibition to rubber, from mud to politics, from ice cream to peace, till far into the night, just to forget the burning, gnawing hunger. And then we leaned back to sleep.

"Clack-clack, clack-clack, clack-clack," howled the wheels to the rails. It drummed and throbbed in my head, like the steady, crunching impact of a hammer. I dreamed of machine guns crackling away, smashing their bullets into my brain. The night was an agony.

In the morning, my head ached with a splitting pulsation. Sitting and standing two days, with nothing to eat, in a drunken coach: I felt as if beaten with rods. No one talked much. We tried to doze the time away.

Then near noon the train jolted heavily and stopped. We looked. A city. An officer thrust his head out of the compartment window and spoke to a boy:

"Qu'est-ce que c'est le nom de cette ville?"

"Saint Brieuc."

"Never heard of it."

Just then a voice called down the tracks:

"All out! And bring your mess kits!"

Mess kits! In an instant we jumped upon the seats and fumbled in our bags. The next moment the coaches and cars were empty. And really! There stood a few monstrously big containers with steaming food. At a run officers and men formed in line. Slap! slap! slap! The mess kit towered heapingly full. Cornwilly?



Murphies? Bullets? Slumgullion? Who ever said a word against army food? Why, it was fit for kings!

We squatted down and relished this most delightful meal. Hunger is indeed a wonderful cook. While we were eating, a number of small French boys crowded around us, repeating over and over the begging question the American soldiers heard all the way from Naples to Brest to Coblenz:

“Cigarette? Shoo-gum? Cigarette? Shoo-gum?”

We had no gum; but afterwards I noticed some of the tots smoking cigarettes with great gusto. French youth had learned something from American manhood.

After an hour we were ordered back into the train, and continued our journey, rolling along with fair speed, in and out among the hills and valleys. Wherever our eyes chanced to stray, for miles on miles, we saw orchards in bloom, gorgeously beautiful in their cloaks of immaculate white, the blossoms drifting in the winds, as if a storm had swept out of the mountains and covered the world with snow. Apple-blossom time in Brittany!

I feasted my eyes on the fragrant beauty, and the afternoon passed quickly. Closer and closer we drew toward the goal of our trip. A few more hills and bends—the bay, the docks! A clanging stop. Brest!

“All out!”

The men tumbled out, packs on their shoulders, and lined up alongside the train. Officers walked down the front and took their places.

"Right—dress!"

"Squads—right!"

"Forward—march!"

And off they went, stiff but happy, marching to the camp of Pontanazen.

Arriving there, we immediately betook ourselves to our tents and deposited our luggage. Everything clean, well-policed, sanitary. Each tent—marvelous to relate—contained beds with spring, mattress, and pillows. One of our officers looked at all this comfort and said ruefully:

"Did you ever know it to fail? You never get a good thing in the army until you leave."

He flung himself upon the bed, bounced up and down a few times, stretched his body luxuriously, folded his hands over his chest, closed his eyes, sighed, and exclaimed:

"Now let me sleep—for a million years!"

"Lieutenant, soon you'll be sleeping in your own bed at home."

"Home! Where did I hear that word before? I simply can't realize that we are going home. Here we are at the port. And yet, Father, I fear that any moment someone may come and send us back to the mud flats of Verneuil."

He spoke the truth. It hardly seemed possible that we were about to leave the shores of France. It appeared more a dream than a reality. In the days that followed, one fact helped to bring the realization

closer: the routine of our life at Brest. Drills every day for the men. Pack inspection, physical inspection, personal inspection. Delouseing and refitting. It all told us we were leaving. But no one knew when we would sail.

A week passed. Then, on Decoration Day, came the news that answered the prayer of every soldier-boy's waiting mother and stilled the yearning of every soldierboy's heart: "Tomorrow!"

And "Tomorrow" dawned with a burst of golden sunshine upon the green hills and over the blue sea. There was no frenzy of happiness, no hysteria of joy; no singing, shouting, screaming. The men were calm, sedate, earnest. After the noonday meal they waited near their tents, eager to depart.

Silently they fell in line; silently they saddled the packs upon their shoulders; silently they marched down the camp road and through Brest to the docks; and silently they boarded the lighter to ride out to the steamer anchored beyond the breakwater.

The hawsers were loosened and the lighter drifted away from the wharf. All faces turned to the shore that slowly moved back. One lad forgot himself and began to shout:

"Bye-bye, France! Hope I don't see. . ."

He never finished the sentence. Somebody thumped him so hard in the back that it knocked the breath out of his lungs. A hundred faces scowled at him and a dozen voices hissed at him:







Top: P.W.E. Troops Preparing for Inspection by General Pershing

Bottom: Troops Leaving for U.S.A. on Cap Finisterre

"Hey! Cut it out!"

"We'll chuck you overboard!"

"Do you want us to be yanked back?"

"They pulled a whole regiment off a boat last month on account of a fool like you!"

"Yeah. And made them stay a month longer for punishment."

"Gee, some fellas got brains so small, if you'd put them in the egg of a cootie, they'd rattle in there like a bean in a base drum!"

"The nutty loon!"

"Somebody's always got to start sumptin."

"We wanta go home!"

Like the Sword of Damocles, fear hung over the heads of the men that any undue manifestation of feeling might cause their sailing orders to be revoked. Weird stories were told about the rigor of the embarkation authorities at Brest. These soldiers wished to leave France and would take no chances.

Over the mirrorlike water the lighter made its way, passed the bar, and nosed over to the steamer in the harbor. It was the *Cap Finisterre*, a former German South-American liner, a fair-size boat, with good accommodations. By nightfall all troops were on board.

We weighed anchor next morning. The early sun flecked the rippling water with crests of molten gold that danced past the ship out to the sea, coaxing us to follow. Our two funnels belched up a cloud of black



smoke, the hum of the screws came up dully from the bowels of the steamer, and the coast began to slip by. Soon we left the harbor and dipped into the sea.

Farther and farther we sailed, the sky line of France fading in the distance. Ten thousand eyes gazed past the wake of the ship, fixed upon that waning, narrowing strip of coastland—intently, almost wistfully. As the last green, sunlit elevation sank beneath the waves, a soldier standing near me straightened up and murmured softly to himself:

“Good-by, France! And now—to God’s Country!”

And like a responsive echo, unconsciously the ten thousand eyes swerved away from the east and turned to the west, looking over the ocean toward God’s Country and—Home!

France was gone. The France of vivid memories. The France of war. The France of pain and tragedy. Gone were the blood-soaked fields, the trench-scarred meadows, the shell-torn cities, where blood ran red in the dirt and the stench of death reeked foully in the air from the unburied bodies that dinged the earth. Gone was the turmoil and the welter of battle, where the bellowing artillery shattered the air with its murderous thunder, where the shrapnels slashed their way screechingly through the sky, and the machine guns ripped wide swathes through the lines of the crumpling columns. Gone were the fighting hosts of green-gray, blue-gray, and khaki, who had lunged so savagely and fiercely at each other’s throats, until they fell down side by side, their heart’s blood commingling in

a sickening pool, groaning out their souls together into the hands of their common God. Gone, all this horror of war. Gone, with the vanished shore of France.

We had done our own little part in this Epic of the World and were happy to return from the Great Adventure. And there, across the bounding main, beyond the foam-dashed billows, in the bosom of the west, lay the land of our birth. And somewhere in it was—Home! Perhaps a mansion in the suburbs, in the sun-checked shade of stately arching elms. Perhaps a little brown cottage with a patch of lawn and a plot of roses. Perhaps only a smelly apartment under the noon-hot roof of some dingy tenement. But it was Home! And Home is Love. The Love that rocked our cradle, soothed our pains, taught us to lisp, heard our prayers, urged us to goodness, led us to manhood. The Love that always smiles and always welcomes, that never fails and never dies. And now we were returning to this Love and this Home.

We counted the days.

One, two, and three, and four.—Half the voyage over. Somewhere in mid-ocean. On the peak of the sweeping main.

Five, six, seven, and eight.—From Sunday to Sunday. How long the week! Eventless. Unchanging in the everlasting sameness of sky and sea, but beautiful withal. No storm and no rain—just blue heavens and blue waters. With the bright warm sunshine playing on the rolling, heaving, glistening swells. At night the pallid moon, sailing like a silver boat on a placid, tur-

quoise sea. And no sound in all the vast immensity but the breathing of the winds, the swish of the ship, and the voices of the soldier lads singing of home. It was a journey through fairy realms, a Voyage of Happiness.

Nine.—Surely, today we should reach the land of our dreams! Like birds on the wing, our eyes flew ahead, yearning for the first, faint glimpse of the shores of our homeland. We fancied we spied it a thousand times; but a thousand times our eyes were deceived.

The sun set in sheerest glory. It flung a road of gold across the waves; and down its glittering path our steamer traveled in majestic calm. As it touched the sea, the sun turned blood red; and to me it seemed to be the blazing heart of America, aglow with love, bleeding from the wounds of war, welcoming back her soldier sons to the Land of Peace. Then the sea rose up and swallowed the sun, and gone was all the glory. Darkness; and night; but no land.

The tenth of June.—Morning. The constant hum of the screws was absent. Could it be—? I went on deck. All around a gray-white mist. In New York Bay and unable to proceed: fogbound! The murky shrouds swept over the boat, enveloping it with a pall, as if it were a ghost ship just risen from the deep. Soldiers lined the rails, crammed the forepart, hung in the rigging, crouched upon the life rafts, hazy, shadowy, unreal, spectral; waiting for the fog to lift, eager for the boat to move, aching for land. The fog clung to the water: an hour; two; three. Then it



thinned, tore, rolled up, and floated away. A soldier in the rigging shouted:

"Land!"

And five thousand voices whispered in awe and delight: "Land! There!"

Then all were silent. But every eye drank in the beauty of the picture. So lovely it looked, gold and green in the sunlight! God's Country indeed!

Slowly and cautiously our ship picked its way up the channel through the clearing mist. Halfway up to the harbor a gay little craft, bedecked with many flags, came down, cut a neat circle, and kept pace with our course. New York City's Reception Boat. They greeted and cheered. Then with magnificent dash, the band on the little boat played the Star-Spangled Banner.

"Oh, say can you see. . ."

Every single one of us shot up to his full length, bolt upright, rigid, at salute, until the last note of the anthem faded over the water in a trail of dying echoes. It was stirring, thrilling, soul-gripping. Oh, the joy of it! The bliss of it! It glowed in every eye, and smiled on every lip, and beat in every heart! My blood tingled, and my pulse raced furiously.

All the way in, the boats, from steamers and ferries to tugs and launches, blew their whistles in a bedlam of riotous noise. And cheers, cheers, cheers! But our lads were strangely quiet, overcome by the thought of being home.

Again that voice in the rigging sang out, shrill,

piercing, exultant: "There she is! The Statue of Liberty!"

As if a curtain had been drawn aside, the tattered remnants of the fog divided for a moment, revealing her to our eyes in striking clearness. Massive and colossal, Liberty towered on high, holding her hand aloft, like the Mother of America greeting her heroes from afar. Instinctively every soldier doffed his cap, silently welcoming the "Lady with the Lamp."

And now, as if divining our innermost feelings, the band played "Home, Sweet Home." The touching, tender melody released every bond of restraint in the souls of all of us. The effect was terrific in its elemental power. Men's hearts melted like wax. Heads bowed, and hands leaped suddenly to eyes. Voices quivered and broke, and the tears streamed freely down war-hardened faces.

My own heart was big in my throat, and I thought it surely would burst! My eyes were clouded and I could barely see. With a supreme effort I sought to control my emotion.

A little to the side of me I heard a smothered cry. I looked. There stood a nurse. Her left hand clutched frantically at her heart, her right held a handkerchief half buried in her mouth, her eyes were closed, and from under the lids big tears flowed ceaselessly: I thought she would faint. With a quick step I went to her and, in a voice that I hardly recognized as my own, I asked: "Nurse! What is it?"

"Oh!—I can't—stand it! I'm so—happy—I think—I'm going—to—die!"

And with that she slumped into her steamer chair and cried like a child.

I turned away and looked ahead of me; a little more, and I would be unnerved myself. There, on a life raft, sat a soldier. His weather-beaten face stared blankly down at his knees, and his body rocked gently with the rhythm of the music.

"Be it ever so humble,  
There's no place like home!"

Suddenly, bending over on his side, sobbing heart-brokenly, he threw himself flat upon the raft.

I walked away and came face to face with a medical Captain who had witnessed all the horrors of war with undimmed eyes. His mouth sagged, twitching convulsively, and his huge, strong frame shook as with the palsy. In a strangely altered voice he stammered, while the tears rolled down his cheeks:

"G-God! G-God! We're h-home!"

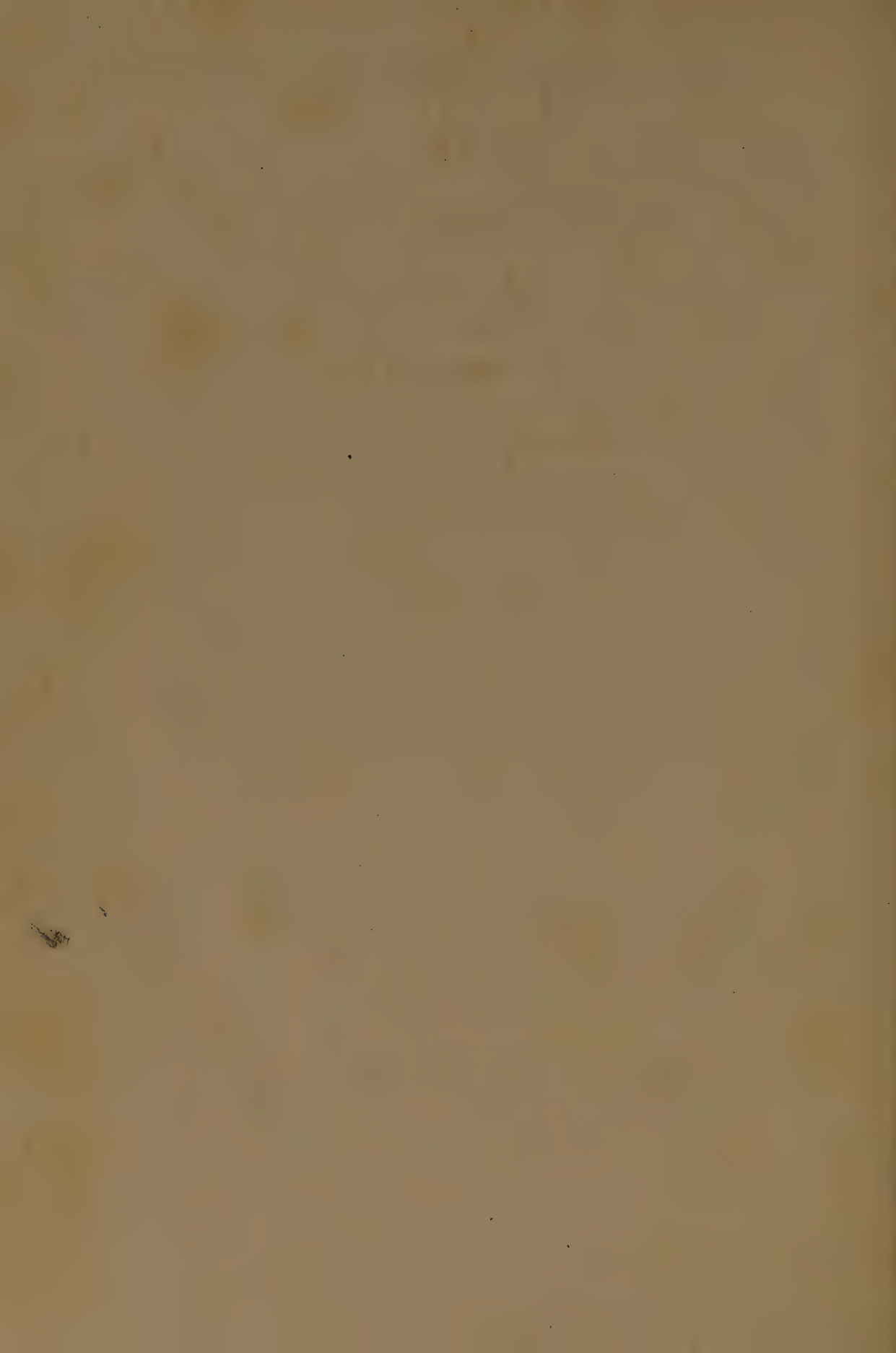
I could hold myself no longer. Deep down in my soul something burst asunder. With a mighty rush that nothing could stem, the tears welled up and gushed from my eyes in a flood.

And I wept, and wept, and wept.

And thus we came home from War.

FINIS



















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**WITHDRAWN**

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